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General Assembly

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Official Records

12th plenary meeting
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New York

President: Mr. Deiss ..... (Switzerland)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kleib (Indonesia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Address by Mr. Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of Georgia.

Mr. Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Saakashvili: It is always a great honour for me to address the annual gathering of the General Assembly.

In uncertain times such as ours, cooperation is more necessary than ever. Unless we stand together and invent new approaches to the global challenges we all face, we shall be torn apart by fear and self-destructive interests. Gatherings such as this, therefore, are valuable only if they allow us to shape a common vision for concrete action towards peace, development, solidarity and justice.

This month, thanks to the coordinated efforts of the international community and the leadership of President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton, direct peace talks have resumed between Israelis and Palestinians. This is a very important moment, because they resume precisely when many people had given up hope for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The road to peace, security, and justice is still a long one. The remaining obstacles are enormous. But the goal is so noble and necessary that no effort should be spared. That is why today I would like to pay tribute to all those who are taking risks for peace. Yes, risks. Because peace is never obvious, never easy. That is certainly true in the Middle East, and it is true in my region as well.

One of our common goals, then, must be to enable those risk-takers who have the courage to defy conventional wisdom and forge new paths to peace. Peace is not an easy way. But peace is the only way.

As the President of a young democracy that recently suffered from war and invasion and is still under partial occupation of an important part of its territory by a nuclear super-Power, I can say this: peace is our most precious common goal and, at the same time, our only path towards the other goals we share.

To those here and in my own country who see no way to reverse the armed occupation or reduce regional tensions, I say: peace is not only the goal, it is also the means to any goal.

Today my region is at a crossroads. For too long, it has suffered from division, injustice, conflict, colonization and violence. Today, however, change is possible. In fact, change is already taking place. I came

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here to speak about this change and to promote a specific vision — a vision of a free, stable and united Caucasus.

From the times of Pushkin, Lermontov or Tolstoy to the present day, the Caucasian mountains have been a symbol of wilderness and paradoxes, a region where individuals and souls were fundamentally free, but where citizens were brutally oppressed; where people and cultures were deeply tolerant, but where Governments and authorities created artificial divisions; where shepherds would cross 5,000-metres-high mountains, but where rulers erected walls nobody could cross. I have come here today to tell the Assembly that those times are vanishing, that the dream of unity and peace is possible.

When I addressed the Assembly two years ago — in the aftermath of a full-scale invasion, and when the Russian Foreign Minister was openly discussing with foreign diplomats and the international community the possibility of Georgia's total annihilation — few people believed that our country would survive as an independent and democratic State. Few people thought that our Government would endure, that our economy would survive the war and the global crisis, that our reforms could continue with renewed vigour, or that we would make steady progress towards the European Union and Euro-Atlantic structures.

Well, I am proud to tell the Assembly, two years later, that we have succeeded against all the odds, thanks to the commitment of the Georgian people and to the support of friends and allies. Today, Georgia is back.

Georgia is back, first, as a laboratory for political reform and social transformation.

More than ever, we are committed to the promise at the heart of the Rose Revolution to turn a failed State into a modern European one. Our local elections last May were proof of that transformation and a milestone for our democracy, the result of seven years of patient, constant, tireless reform.

Our objective is clear: to create a more institutionalized system of liberal democratic governance.

My term as President ends in 2013. These changes will survive my presidency and the current Government, because we are not speaking only about changes of leadership or reforms of institutions; we are speaking about something deeper and stronger — something that *The Economist* of London recently branded as Georgia's "mental revolution".

The Georgian people have tasted freedom, the absence of corruption, the fruits of economic development, the emergence of a true meritocracy. They have changed their behaviour, their vision of the world, their dreams even, and they will mightily resist any attempts to reverse those changes — no matter whether those attempts come from inside or from abroad.

This is our great victory: we helped to create something that goes far beyond the leaders and parties that led the Rose Revolution. We helped to create a revolution of the heart and the mind.

Once one of the most corrupt countries of the post-Soviet world, Georgia has made greater gains in the fight against corruption, as witnessed by Transparency International, than any other country over the past five years. Once a place where foreign investors were kidnapped by gangs and mafias, Georgia is now ranked by the World Bank as number 11 for ease of doing business in the world — a ranking we hope to further improve this year — and the number 1 in Eastern and Central Europe. These rankings make clear why Georgia's only interest is a peaceful resolution of conflicts: Georgia is winning the peace — Georgia is winning through peace.

Our northern neighbour expected us to change our path when it imposed on us a full embargo in 2006, invaded us in 2008, ethnically cleansed Georgian regions and illegally occupied 20 per cent of our territory, an occupation that continues to this day. All these actions had one objective: to destroy the Georgian laboratory of political, economic and social reform — to prevent the region from changing.

We answered those relentless attacks by reinvigorating our reforms, opening our economy even more, and accelerating our social transformation. This is our policy, and no provocation will ever make us change it. Thanks to this commitment to reform, Georgia is now a responsible international player.

I am proud that my nation is fighting international terrorism in Afghanistan. I pay tribute here to our nearly 1,000 soldiers who are risking their lives every day in the south of Afghanistan to help the Afghan people secure a stable, terror-free future. I pay

a special tribute today to company commander First Lieutenant Mukhran Shukvani, who died earlier this month. Mukhran was killed in the cause of peace, while serving alongside NATO forces in the dangerous Helmand province of Afghanistan.

We are fighting other common scourges, now focusing especially on the terrible danger of nuclear trafficking. Many times over the past seven years we have intercepted criminals who had in their possession the essential ingredients for nuclear devices. Every step of the way, we have cooperated with our allies in the international community to ensure that Georgia is doing everything possible to confront this global danger.

Here I must pause to draw attention to a grave problem that resulted from the partial occupation of my country — a problem that everybody should worry about, even those who overlook and do not care too much about violations of international law, who forget 500,000 internally displaced persons and refugees; even those who dismiss repeated assaults on basic human rights, civil liberties and the environment.

I am speaking of the lawlessness bred by the Russian occupation. Our two occupied regions exist in a black hole of governance. Today, in those lands, criminals act with impunity. The most elemental human rights are abused. Drugs and weapons are smuggled. People are trafficked. And potential weapons of mass destruction are moved in and out of the territories, posing a threat to us all.

Three days ago, we met in this very place to discuss the Millennium Development Goals and our progress in meeting them over the past decade. I shall not tire the Assembly with a recitation of our efforts to achieve the Goals, the strides we have made in halving our poverty rate and decreasing by two thirds our extreme poverty, reforming our educational system and improving health care.

But I will tell the Assembly that all those successes remain bittersweet for me, because they cannot be savoured by all the people of Georgia — not by those who live in fear for their basic rights in the occupied territories, nor fully by the 500,000 internally displaced persons and refugees who were expelled from their homes and cannot go back and regain their property.

For the last two years the Russian Federation has been violating the ceasefire agreement brokered in August 2008 by my good friend French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was acting at the time on behalf of the European Union. The Russian army has not withdrawn as required by the ceasefire. European Union monitors cannot enter Russian-occupied areas of Georgia, where a constant military build-up is taking place. Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons, victims of the ethnic cleansing campaign led by the Russian forces, are still prevented from entering their homes.

How did Georgia respond to those violations of international law and human rights? We answered with patience and calm. We implemented — fully — the ceasefire agreement and went beyond our obligations, without ever using as a pretext Russia's refusal to comply. Last month, the head of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, Ambassador Haber, publicly praised Georgian policy as "constructive unilateralism".

What does constructive unilateralism mean? It refers, for instance, to our calm when militias supported by Russia's federal security service (FSB) killed our policemen at the occupation line, or to our willingness to free criminals working for the occupation regime when the other side was kidnapping teenagers who wanted to visit their empty house just after their school time.

Constructive unilateralism means that we behave in a civilized and patient way, even when our enemy uses barbaric methods or implements an impulsive and irrational policy. It means that — even if peace requires both sides to come to the negotiating table — one can pave the way to peace on one's own, without the other side's cooperating.

This constructive unilateralism is based on the idea that peace is in the supreme interest of Georgia, that peace is the only path to the de-occupation of our country. It forms the substance of the strategy on occupied territories that my Government has put in motion to engage the populations held hostage by the Russian occupiers, on the other side of the new Iron Curtain that illegally divides our country.

Like the Berlin Wall, walls like the one dividing Georgia will be brought down not by bombs, but by the commitment of citizens to build a free, united country — and by the commitment of the world

community to enforce international law and the principles of the Charter.

This commitment is expressed in the refusal of nearly the entire world to legitimize the Russian occupation and the result of ethnic cleansing by recognizing the so-called independence of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, a de facto annexation of Georgian territories by the Russian Federation.

It is noticeable that, despite enormous pressure and multiple threats from Moscow, not a single former Soviet republic has recognized this dismemberment of Georgia. It shows — to the great surprise of those who describe the fall of the Soviet empire as the worst catastrophe of the twentieth century — that the old times are definitely over. It shows that the change I evoked earlier has already taken root. It shows that all the former captive nations of Soviet times are now independent States that can determine their own policies. It is noticeable — and it is noticed in Moscow.

I solemnly call today on those three, isolated Member States that recognized Russia's de facto annexation of our territories and legitimized the Russian-led ethnic cleansing of around 500,000 citizens, to acknowledge that it is never too late to reverse a bad policy. The dismemberment of Georgia has failed categorically — and even the Russian Federation will one day need to reverse its disastrous policy. Imagine how uncomfortable those leaders from faraway countries will be when Moscow itself chooses to comply with international law and withdraw its troops. Because that day will come.

Those who claimed a military victory in 2008 now face a diplomatic and political defeat. And in Moscow the occupation and annexation will soon be debated. They are in fact already debated in the corridors of the Kremlin, because this situation is not sustainable, even for the Russian leadership.

We have now in our country Russian soldiers deserting their units and fleeing to the Georgian side through the wall erected by their superiors, just as Soviet soldiers did in Berlin during the cold war. In which direction is history moving? Certainly not in the direction of those who can deploy thousands of tanks in a very short time, but who cannot even take care of their soldiers or prevent them from fleeing.

Those who refuse to modernize their society and to open their political system may have an interest in war and instability. But in Georgia we know, and we have always known, that peace is our interest — the very precondition of our survival and our success.

I have three calls to make today.

My first call is addressed to my fellow citizens, ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetian, who live behind the new Iron Curtain that divides our common nation. I want to tell them once again: We will protect your rights, your culture, your history — we will work with you, we will work for you. You are part of a common history, a common culture and a common future. Your differences enrich our proud national tapestry. Rather than see you succumb to annexation by the emerging Russian empire, we invite you to build together with us a multicultural and multi-ethnic society that will be a regional model for tolerance and respect.

I dream about the day when — as has happened several times in our common history — an Abkhaz or Ossetian citizen of Georgia becomes President and leader of a democratic and European Georgia. And this dream will become possible in a reunited and free Georgia, a Georgia that will build positive relations and even intense cooperation with the Russian Federation, a Russian Federation acting as a rational international player and not as a revisionist or revanchist Power; a Russian Federation that will have chosen cooperation instead of confrontation and has dropped the politics of embargoes and intolerance, and instead of imposing crackdowns will be a good partner to cooperate with.

My second call is, therefore, to the Russian leadership, to whom I say: You face a choice. Either you take a major part in the ongoing transformation of our common region, accepting that other countries are your partners and not vassals, or this transformation will happen without you. We all want — I personally want — Russia as a great partner and not as an enemy. That is why the Georgian Government supports the reset policy of the United States and the European Union's engagement with Russia. Nobody has a greater stake than we have in seeing Russia turn into a country that truly operates within the concert of nations, respects international law and — this is often connected — upholds basic human rights.

I want to tell the Russian people that they will always be welcome in Georgia, as tourists, as students,

as businessmen, as journalists or simply as friends, but never as occupation forces. And I want to tell the Russian leaders that they should care more about their citizens and less about our diplomatic orientation, more about developing the Northern Caucasus — a region that is exploding as I speak — than about undermining our development. They are welcome to come too if they want, in order to understand how a post-Soviet society can turn into a European one. We invite them to come, with notebooks rather than with missiles, with iPads rather than Kalashnikovs.

I was pleased to note that some of our reforms inspired a few recent presidential speeches in Moscow. Instead of fighting each other, we should excel together in modernizing our common region. And instead of secretly copying or envying our reforms, they should cooperate with us in building a stable and free region, building stable and free countries. Because by looking over the best pupil's shoulder one might not get the full picture of what modernization means. The complete picture is rather simple: lasting stability and prosperity cannot be achieved without respecting some basic principles.

Modernization without freedom is not sustainable. One cannot hope to diversify and develop one's economy when one sends one's most talented and successful businessmen to the Gulag, as happened to Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Computers are not enough without free minds to use them. So let us free our minds from our common Soviet past in order to build a common future.

My third and final call is to every member of the international community: help us to secure peace — in Georgia, but also in our broader region. We Georgians have learned tragically how a so-called frozen conflict can very quickly become a hot one.

If there is clear support from the international community, I am convinced that a lasting peace can be secured in the Caucasus. I am convinced that if the world shows the same commitment to a peaceful resolution of conflicts in my region as in other parts of the world we can accomplish wonders. It is in everybody's interest to see this strategic region, this crossroads of civilizations, become more stable, prosperous and open.

History has taught us that wars can erupt quickly — but also that brave leaders can secure peace where nobody would ever believe that conflicts could be resolved. History has taught us that regions that were torn apart by armed conflicts and contaminated by hate — starting with Europe — can achieve lasting peace through cooperation, interdependence and unity. History has taught us that dreams are often more realistic than resignation.

I strongly believe that a common market, shared interests and political and economic interdependence will one day give birth to a united Caucasus. That is what I call for today.

We share a similar history of oppression, but we have also in common a deep, essential and undefeated aspiration for freedom. Let us capitalize on this aspiration. Our region will never be truly free if it is not united.

It will of course require a long and difficult series of efforts and gestures, from all of us, but the objective is worth every sacrifice. As happened a long time ago with the European Union — that amazing geopolitical revolution we aspire to join one day — the historic move towards Caucasian unity will start with concrete projects, in the energy sector, in the education and the cultural fields and in the civil society sphere.

We should begin with more people-to-people exchanges. It is time we got to know each other and forged links that will bring us together without changing existing inter-State borders.

My birth town and our capital, Tbilisi, is inhabited by Caucasians of every religion and every ethnicity. Together they form a living example of tolerance and cooperation. So it is possible. We leaders have to learn from this cohabitation of peoples and translate it into geopolitics.

Our unity would not be directed against anyone. Once again, we will not aspire to change any borders. That needs to be emphasized.

We may belong to different States and ethnic groups, and live on different sides of the mountains, but in terms of human and cultural space there is no North and South Caucasus; there is only one Caucasus, which belongs to world civilization and Europe and will one day join the big European family of free nations, following the Georgian path.

We, the Caucasians, driven by legitimate or imaginary threats of assimilation or attacks from other Powers, or from each other, hoped too often to be

protected by neighbouring empires. This anxious search for foreign shelter led us to subjugation, assimilation, annexation and historical tragedy. It authorized foreign leaders to artificially emphasize and manipulate our divisions.

We — Caucasian people — all made the same mistake through history. It is time to change. It is time to stick together, to help each other to survive and progress. It is time to understand that our region has sufficient resources and potential for all of us. It is time to rely on ourselves, on the human potential of our citizens, on development of our own education system, and time to organize our own development.

The Caucasus is one of the birthplaces of world civilization. It is time to show that the energy of our ancestors does not belong only to an iconic past, and that we have something to give to our children and to the world. It is time to stop fighting and weakening each other and to realize that our strength consists in unity. It is time for unity and peace. It is time to stop being prisoners of the past and to move towards our common future.

In the past, Georgian citizens perceived our border with the Ottoman Empire as an absolute threat. Today, we have passport-free customs; we can enter each other's country without passports and visas. We have a joint airport and free trade with Turkey, and very friendly relations. Tomorrow, the citizens of Armenia and Azerbaijan will be able to cross our borders without passports. Even today there is a very simplified procedure; they do not even have to leave their cars.

Recently, a foreign diplomat told me that after crossing our only legal crossing point with Russia he encountered dozens of roadblocks where dangerous-looking, unshaven local militiamen and FSB agents kept blocking the passage from one valley to another, from one village to another, aggressively preventing individuals from circulating in their own country. There is also talk about the eventuality of, and preparation for, a new war with Georgia.

It is time to replace those people, barbed wire and roadblocks by open borders and passport-free customs, to replace camps for internally displaced persons by joint schools and universities, to replace the Kalashnikov by computers, and to replace missiles by books or television sets.

In 2008, thousands and thousands of tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery platforms, troops and militias crossed the Caucasian mountains, bringing destruction, death and hatred. Now it is time for ideas — the ideas of freedom and unity that we all cherish — to cross the same mountains, bringing hope, life and even love.

As I speak, thousands of tanks, armoured vehicles and missile platforms are entrenched or moving all across the Caucasus. If we remain on our own, isolated from each other, they surely will prevail. But if everybody holds his neighbour's hand, if tens of millions of unarmed people peacefully stand together, shoulder to shoulder, being the continuation of each other, just like the Caucasian mountains, then no brutal force will ever break through this chain of awakened human spirits and this irresistible thirst for freedom.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Georgia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Acting President: The Assembly will hear an address by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Ahmadinejad (*spoke in Farsi; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): I am grateful to the Almighty God who has granted me the opportunity to appear before this world Assembly once again.

I wish to begin by commemorating those who lost their lives in the horrible flood in Pakistan and expressing my heartfelt sympathy with the families who lost their loved ones, as well as with the people

and the Government of Pakistan. I urge everyone to assist their fellow men and women as a humane duty.

Let me thank Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, who presided over the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session, for all his efforts during his tenure. I also congratulate Mr. Joseph Deiss on being elected to preside over the current session, and wish him every success.

In past years, I have spoken to the Assembly about some hopes and concerns; some concerns involve family crises, the security challenge, disrespect for human dignity, the deterioration of the world economy, climate change and disregard for human aspirations to achieve justice and lasting peace.

After about a hundred years of domination, the capitalist system and the existing world order have proved to be unable to provide appropriate solutions to the problems of societies; thus their demise has come about. I shall try to examine several causes of this failure and picture features of an ideal order.

The first cause of failure relates to our attitudes and beliefs. As the Assembly is well aware, the divine prophets had the mission to call everyone to monotheism, love and justice and to show mankind the path to prosperity. They invite men to contemplation and to seek knowledge in order to better appreciate the truth and to refrain from atheism and egoism.

The essence of the message of all prophets is one and the same. Every messenger endorsed the messenger before him, and gave glad tidings about the prophet to come, who presented a more complete version of the religion in accordance with man's capacity at the time. This trend continued until the last messenger of God, who presented the perfection of an all-inclusive religion.

In opposition to the call by the prophets, the egoist and the greedy stood up against their clear call, revolting against their messages. Nimrod countered Hazrat Abraham, Pharaoh countered Hazrat Moses, and the greedy countered Hazrat Jesus Christ and Hazrat Muhammad — may peace be upon all our prophets.

In recent centuries, human ethics and values have been rejected as a cause of backwardness. They were even portrayed as opposing wisdom and science, because the proclaimers of religion in the dark ages of the West inflicted man with backwardness. Therefore, man's disconnection from heaven has detached him from his true self.

Man — with his potential to understand the secrets of the universe, his instinct to seek truth, his aspirations for justice and perfection, his quest for beauty and purity, and his capacity to represent God on Earth — has been reduced to a creature restricted by the materialistic world with a mission to maximize individualistic pleasures. Human instinct, then, replaced true human nature.

Human beings and nations are considered rivals, and the happiness of an individual or a nation is upheld at the cost of others, to the point of even eliminating or suppressing others; rather than developing a constructive and evolutionary method of cooperation, it was replaced by a destructive struggle for survival. The lust for capital and domination replaced monotheism, which is the gateway to love and unity.

This widespread clash of the egoist with the divine values gave way to slavery and colonialism. A large part of the world came under the domination of a few Western States. Tens of millions of people were taken into slavery, and tens of millions of families were shattered as a result. All the resources, the rights and the cultures of the colonized nations were plundered. Lands were occupied and the indigenous people were humiliated and mass-murdered.

Yet, nations rose up, colonialism was alienated, and the independence of nations was recognized. Thus, the hope for respect, prosperity and security was revived among nations. In the beginning of the past century beautiful motives of freedom, human rights and democracy created hopes for healing the deep wounds of the past. Today, however, not only are those dreams not realized, but memories, even at times more bitter than before, have been recorded in our history.

As a result of the two World Wars, the occupation of Palestine, the Korean and Viet Nam wars, the Iraq war against Iran, the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as many wars in Africa, hundreds of millions of people were killed, wounded or displaced. Terrorism, illicit drug production, poverty and social gaps have increased. The dictatorial and coups d'état Governments in Latin America committed unprecedented crimes, with the support of the West.

Instead of disarmament, the proliferation and stockpiling of nuclear, biological and chemical

weapons expanded, putting the world under a bigger threat. As a result, the very same old goals of colonialists and the slave masters were pursued, but this time around with a new façade.

The second cause of the failure of the existing world order and capitalism has to do with the current global management and its ruling structures. The League of Nations and then the United Nations were established with the promise of bringing about peace, security and the realization of human rights, which in fact meant a global management.

One can analyse the current system for governance of world affairs by examining three events.

The first event is that of 11 September 2001, which has affected the whole world for almost a decade. We recall that at the time suddenly the news of an attack on the Twin Towers was broadcast using numerous footages of the incident. Almost all Governments and important figures strongly condemned this incident. But then a propaganda machine came into full force; it was implied that the whole world was now exposed to a huge danger — terrorism — and that the only way to save the world was to deploy forces into Afghanistan. Eventually Afghanistan and shortly thereafter Iraq were occupied.

I ask the Assembly please to take note: It was said that some 3,000 people were killed on 11 September, for which we are all very saddened. Yet so far in Afghanistan and Iraq hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, while millions have been wounded and displaced, and the conflict is still going on and expanding.

In identifying those responsible for the 11 September attack, there were three viewpoints. The first was that a very powerful and complex terrorist group, able to successfully cross all layers of American intelligence and security, carried out the attack. That is the prevalent viewpoint advocated by American statesmen.

The second viewpoint was that some segments within the United States Government orchestrated the attack to reverse the declining American economy and its grip on the Middle East in order also to save the Zionist regime. The majority of the American people as well as other nations and politicians around the world agree with this view.

The third viewpoint was that the attack was carried out by a terrorist group, but that the American Government supported and took advantage of the situation. Apparently, this viewpoint has fewer proponents.

The main evidence for that viewpoint links the incident to a few passports found in the huge volume of rubble and a video of an individual whose place of domicile was unknown, but it was announced that he had been involved in oil deals with some American officials. It was also covered up and said that due to the explosion and fire no trace of suicide attackers was found.

Regardless of each of those three viewpoints, there remain a few questions to be answered.

First, would it not have been sensible that first a thorough investigation should have been conducted by independent groups to conclusively identify the elements involved in the attack and then map out a rational plan to take measures against them?

Secondly, assuming the viewpoint of the American Government, is it rational to launch a classic war through widespread deployment of troops that led to the death of hundreds of thousands of people to counter a terrorist group?

Thirdly, was it not possible to act in the way in which Iran conducted the operations fighting the Riggi terrorist group, who killed and wounded 400 innocent people? In the Iranian operation no innocent person was harmed.

It is proposed that the United Nations set up an independent fact-finding group in regard to the event of 11 September to ensure that the different views about it are not banned from future discussions.

I wish to announce here that next year the Islamic Republic of Iran will host a conference to study terrorism and the means to confront it. I invite officials, scholars, thinkers, researchers and research institutes of all countries to attend the conference.

The second cause of the demise of the existing world order is the occupation of the Palestinian territories. The oppressed people of Palestine have lived under the rule of an occupying regime for 60 years, and have been deprived of freedom, security and the right to self-determination, while the occupiers are given recognition. On a daily basis, houses are

being destroyed over the heads of innocent women and children. People are deprived of water, food and medicine in their own homeland.

The Zionists have imposed five all-out wars on the neighbouring countries and on the Palestinian people. The Zionists committed the most horrible crimes against defenceless people in the wars against Lebanon and Gaza. The Zionist regime attacked a humanitarian flotilla in a blatant defiance of all international norms and killed civilians. This regime, which enjoys the absolute support of some Western countries, regularly threatens the countries in the region and continues publicly to announce the assassination of Palestinian figures, while Palestinian defenders and those opposing the regime are pressured, labelled as terrorists and called anti-Semites. All values, even the freedom of expression, which seem to matter so much in Europe and in the United States, and to be so important, have been sacrificed at the altar of Zionism.

Solutions are doomed to fail because the right of the Palestinian people is not taken into account. Would we have witnessed such horrendous crimes if instead of the occupation being recognized, the sovereign right of the Palestinian people had been recognized?

Our unambiguous proposition favours the return of the Palestinian refugees to their home land and a vote by the people of Palestine, all Palestinians, to exercise their sovereignty and decide on their type of governance.

The third cause of the demise of the existing order has to do with the outlook on nuclear energy. Nuclear energy is clean and cheap and a heavenly gift which is among the most suitable alternatives to cut pollution emanating from fossil fuels. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) allows all States parties to use nuclear energy without limits, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is mandated to provide such States with technical and legal support.

The nuclear bomb is the worst inhumane weapon, and must be totally eliminated. The NPT prohibits its development and stockpiling, and calls for nuclear disarmament. Nonetheless, some permanent members of the Security Council and other nuclear Powers — those that possess the nuclear bomb — have resorted to the following measure. They have equated nuclear energy with the nuclear bomb, and have removed such energy from the reach of most nations by establishing monopolies and pressuring IAEA. At the same time, they have continued to maintain, expand and upgrade their own nuclear arsenals. The Assembly may have heard that in the current year the United States Administration has asked for $80 billion to maintain its nuclear bombs.

The situation that I have described has entailed the following: Not only has nuclear disarmament not been realized, but also nuclear bombs have proliferated in some regions, including by the occupying and intimidating Zionist regime. Here I would like to propose that 2011 be proclaimed the year of nuclear disarmament and nuclear energy for all, nuclear weapons for none.

In all the cases to which I have referred, I admit, the United Nations has been unable to take any effective, viable course of action. Unfortunately, in the decade proclaimed as the "International Decade for the Culture of Peace" hundreds of thousands have been killed and injured as a result of war, aggression and occupation, and hostilities and antagonism have increased.

Very recently the world witnessed an abhorrent and inhumane act of burning the Holy Koran. The Holy Koran is the Divine Book and the eternal miracle of the Prophet of Islam. It calls for worshipping the One God, justice, compassion towards people, development and progress, reflection and thought, defence of the oppressed and resistance against oppressors; and it names with respect the previous Messengers of God, such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and Jesus Christ — may peace be upon all the prophets — and endorses them. The Koran was burned to burn all those truths and good judgements.

However, the truth cannot be burned. The Koran is eternal, because God and truth are everlasting. This act and any other act that widens the gap and distances between nations is evil. We should wisely avoid playing into the hands of Satan. On behalf of the Iranian nation, I pay respect to all divine books and their followers. In one hand I hold up the Koran and in the other the Bible. We pay respect to both books, as both are dear to us.

For years the inefficiency of capitalism and the existing world management structures have been exposed enough for us to understand what they mean. The majority of States and peoples have begun a quest

for fundamental changes and to allow justice in global relations to prevail.

The cause of the United Nations ineptitude is its unjust structure. Major Powers have monopolized the Security Council, due to their veto privilege, and sidelined the General Assembly, which is the main pillar of the Organization.

In the past several decades, at least one permanent member of the Security Council has always been a party to a conflict. When both the judge and the prosecutor are on the same side of a conflict, how can one expect justice? They feel immune in aggression owing to the structure of the United Nations. For example, if Iran enjoyed the veto privilege, would the Security Council and the IAEA Director General have taken the same position on the nuclear issue?

The United Nations is the key centre for coordinating common global management. Its structure needs to be reformed in such a manner that all independent States and nations may participate actively and constructively in global governance.

The veto privilege should be revoked. The General Assembly should be the highest body, and the Secretary-General should be the most independent official and all his positions and activities should be taken with the approval of the General Assembly and should be directed towards promoting justice and eliminating discrimination in the world order.

The Secretary-General should not come under pressure from Powers and/or the country hosting the Organization for stating the truth and administering justice. It is proposed that the General Assembly should, within a year and in the framework of an extraordinary session, finalize the reformation of the Organization's structure. The Islamic Republic of Iran has clear suggestions in this regard and stands ready to participate actively and constructively in the process.

I announce clearly that the occupation of other countries under the pretext of freedom and democracy is an unforgivable crime. The world needs the logic of compassion and justice and inclusive participation instead of the logic of force, domination, unilateralism, war and humiliation. The world needs to be governed by virtuous people like the Divine Prophets.

The two vast geographical spheres of Africa and Latin America have experienced historic developments during past decades, developments that have changed their face. The new approaches in these two continents, based on an increasing level of integration and unity, as well as on localizing the growth and development models, have borne considerable fruits for the peoples of those regions. The awareness and wisdom of the leaders of the two continents have overcome the regional problems and crises, free of the domineering interference of non-regional Powers.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has expanded its relations with Latin America and Africa in all aspects in recent years.

And now I speak about the glorious Iran. The Tehran Declaration was a hugely constructive step in confidence-building efforts, a step made possible through the admirable good will of the Governments of Brazil and Turkey, along with the close, sincere and honest cooperation of the Iranian Government. Although there was an inappropriate reaction to the Declaration by some Western Powers, and it was followed by an unlawful resolution, it is still valid.

We have observed the IAEA regulations beyond the requirements of our commitments, yet we have never submitted to illegally imposed pressures, nor will we ever do so.

It has been said that there is a desire to pressure Iran into a dialogue. Well, first, Iran has always been ready for a dialogue based on respect and justice. Secondly, methods based on disrespecting nations have long been ineffective. Those who have used intimidation and sanctions in response to the clear logic of the Iranian nation are in real terms destroying the remaining credibility of the Security Council and the trust of nations in it, proving once again how unjust is the Council's function.

When those concerned threaten a great nation, a great people, such as Iran, which has been known throughout history for its scientists, poets, artists and philosophers, and whose culture and civilization are synonymous with purity, submission to God and seeking justice, how can they ever expect other nations to have confidence in them?

It goes without saying that domineering methods — and mainly capitalism — in managing the world have failed. Not only has the era of slavery and colonialism and dominating the world passed, the path to reviving old Empires is blocked, too.

We have announced that we stand ready for a serious and free debate with the American statesmen in this very venue to express our transparent views on issues of importance to the world. It is proposed here that in order to have a constructive dialogue, an annual free debate be organized within the General Assembly.

In conclusion, the Iranian nation and the majority of the world's nations and Governments are opposed to the current discriminatory management of the world. The inhumane nature of that management has led it to a dead end, and it requires a major overhaul.

Reforming the world's affairs and bringing about tranquillity and prosperity requires the participation of all, pure thoughts and the divine and humane management that we have been given. We are all of the view that justice is the basic element for peace, durable security and the spread of love among peoples and nations. It is in justice that mankind seeks the realization of his aspirations, rights and dignity, since he is wary of oppression, humiliation and ill-treatment.

The true nature of mankind is manifested in love for fellow humans and love for all the good in the world. Love is the best foundation for establishing relations among people and among nations. As Vahshi Bafqi, the great Iranian poet, says, "From the fountain of youth, drink a thousand sips/You'll still die if you don't have love's grip". In making a world full of purity, safety and prosperity, people are not rivals, but companions. Those who see their happiness only in the sorrow of others and their welfare and safety only in others' insecurity, those who see themselves as superior to others, are out of the path of humanity and are in evil's course.

Economy and materialistic means are only some tools to serve others, to create friendship and strengthen human connections for spiritual perfection. They are not tools for showing off or means of dominating others.

Men and women complement each other, and the family unit, with pure, loving and long-lasting relations of the spouses, becomes the centre and the guarantee of the continuity and bringing up of generations, for true pleasures, for spreading true love and for reforming society.

Woman is a reflection of God's beauty and the source of love and care. She is the guardian of purity and exquisiteness of society. The tendency to toughen the souls and behaviours of women deprives them of their very basic right of being a loving mother and a caring wife. It will result in a more violent society with irreversible defects.

Freedom is a divine right that should serve peace and human perfection. Pure thoughts and the will of the righteous are keys to the gates of a pure life full of hope, liveliness and beauty. This is the promise of God — that the Earth will be inherited by the pure and the righteous. And the people free from selfishness will take up the management of the world. Then there will be no trace of sorrow, discrimination, poverty, insecurity and aggression. The time for true happiness and the blossoming of the true nature of humankind, the way God has intended, will arrive.

All those seeking justice and all the free spirits have been waiting for this moment and have been promised such a glorious time. The complete human, the true servant of God and the true friend of mankind, whose father was from the generation of the beloved Prophet of Islam and whose mother was from the true believers of Jesus Christ, shall wait along with Jesus, the son of Mary, and the other righteous to appear on those brilliant days and assist humanity. In welcoming them, we should join ranks and seek justice, as would be befitting of man.

Praise to love and worship, praise to justice and freedom, praise to true humanity, the complete human, the true companion of humankind. I say to all those listening: "Peace be upon you and all the righteous and the pure."

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by His Excellency Mr. Ivan Gašparovič, President of the Slovak Republic

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Slovak Republic.

Mr. Ivan Gašparovič, President of the Slovak Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ivan Gašparovič, President of the Slovak Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Gašparovič (*spoke in Slovak: English interpretation provided by the delegation*): Let me congratulate Mr. Joseph Deiss on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session. May the United Nations, under his leadership, confirm its central role in global events. Slovakia stands prepared to support him. I also appreciate the work done by his predecessor at the previous session.

The Slovak Republic fully aligns itself with the European Union's statements. We are pleased that 27 European member States, plus other associated countries, speak in one voice at this universal international forum. This is a good prerequisite to clear the way for widely anticipated effective cooperation between the Union and the United Nations.

Let me now share with the Assembly several remarks on certain global and regional issues from the perspective of the Slovak foreign policy priorities.

The foreign policy of Slovakia, as a United Nations member, is based on respect for the core democratic values, international law and effective multilateralism. We therefore welcome and support the main theme of the sixty-fifth session: "Reaffirming the central role of the United Nations in global governance". This topic is all the more important since we often witness failure to respect binding decisions taken by United Nations bodies, and from time to time even among the various United Nations institutions.

One of the most important missions of the United Nations is to act as a guarantor of the formulation, protection and implementation of the principle of collective security of States. Hence, the preservation of international peace and security at a global level and within the bounds of international law must remain at the core of United Nations activities. For peace and security become particularly vulnerable in times of global financial and economic crises. They require increased attention on our part in order to remain under the control of States and the international community.

The process of arms control and disarmament represents the most important instrument for the prevention of war and other conflict. The progress achieved in the area of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction gives us reason for cautious optimism. Our duty is to continue the effort and to strengthen the global system of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Yet the risk of such weapons falling into the hands of terrorists remains high. We are also prepared to cooperate with our partners on a number of priorities, such as the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

We appreciate the new post-START Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States. We believe that the Treaty will invigorate the process of disarmament, which is getting off the ground, and increase pressure on certain States to desist from their ambitions to own nuclear weapons. In particular, I wish to underscore the important role played by the Conference on Disarmament, which is described as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

In the area of conventional weapons, it is necessary to continue negotiations leading to the adoption of a new, effective arms trade treaty. Adequate attention must also be paid to small arms, the uncontrolled spread of which may have devastating consequences for the maintenance of peace and security, particularly in conflict areas.

United Nations peacekeeping operations represent one of the most visible activities of the United Nations in its efforts to preserve peace and security in the world. Slovakia, as an active contributor to United Nations missions and other international crisis management operations based on a United Nations mandate, welcomes the steps towards reviving the reform of peacekeeping operations as described in the document " A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping".

I believe that the new Global Field Support Strategy will contribute, in real terms, towards a more rapid deployment of peacekeeping missions and, at the same time, ensure a more efficient utilization of human and financial resources.

Proper coordination between the United Nations and regional organizations plays an important role. There is room for improvement, for example, when it comes to cooperation between the EU and NATO at the operational level, but also for a more effective coordination at strategic level.

The United Nations must also play a key role in the prevention of conflicts. Slovakia supports the prevention and mediation role of the United Nations and its capacity-building. It is, however, necessary to exert synergic efforts taking due account of the interests of all stakeholders at the local, regional and global levels in order to eliminate sources of conflict and proceed directly with establishing peace.

The establishment of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which is headed by a Slovak diplomat, was a step in the right direction. The recent events in Kyrgyzstan confirmed the usefulness of this instrument and underscored the need to support it further.

Slovakia takes an active part in peace processes. Since our non-permanent membership in the Security Council in 2006 and 2007, we have continued our involvement in security sector reform. We are glad that since then several strategic papers have been produced and that progress has been made in building the requisite capacities, particularly in cooperation with African countries.

As the chair of the Group of Friends of security sector reform, we continue to actively work towards strengthening the relations in this matter between Member States and the Secretariat. In the course of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly, we teamed up with our partners from Argentina and Indonesia to hold regional workshops dealing with security sector reform in the broader context of preserving and building peace and, at the same time, establishing a link between its global and regional aspects. We are determined to uphold this effort in cooperation with the Inter-agency Task Force on Security Sector Reform, as well as with other Member States and subregional organizations.

Under the Charter, the primary responsibility for international peace and security lies with the Security Council. The process of its reform could almost be called a never-ending story. We are therefore pleased that the intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform were given a clearer shape. It must stand on the following pillars: representativeness, effectiveness in fulfilling its mission and transparency of its working methods, while allowing for possible enforcement of its decisions by sanctions.

The global financial and economic crisis laid bare the weak spots in the existing structures of the world economic order. The key role of the United Nations and its Member States must also be confirmed in this financial and economic dimension at the global level.

At the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, we shared the view that since our efforts in achieving these Goals started some 10 years ago they had not become less topical or less important. Eradicating poverty and hunger, improving the quality of education, adequate employment, improving health-care services and housing, improving maternal health, gender equality and environmental sustainability remain among the central concerns of United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies.

Everyday life also shows us that creating conditions for equitable and sustainable development must go hand in hand with respect for nature and its rules. There is an inherent link between the two, and both have an impact on the life of individuals, who are part of the universal system.

The people of Slovakia had the misfortune to witness nature's power as floods of an unprecedented scale ravaged our country earlier this summer. A proper balance must be struck between development and respect for nature, based on well-reasoned arguments supported by proper analysis, and without giving way to the influence sought by certain narrowly focused transnational organizations that call themselves environmentalists.

For the first time this year, Slovakia took part in the Economic and Social Council meetings as a member. Our experience shows that we need to strengthen the links between the Economic and Social Council and other organizations of the United Nations system and beyond, provided they work towards the same objectives.

Slovakia welcomes the establishment of UN Women — the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. We believe that this entity will help curb all forms of violence against women. We also extend our good wishes for a successful mandate to the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Slovakia rejects any and all forms of intolerance, xenophobia, discrimination, racism and extreme nationalism. We are devoted to the protection of and support for human rights at both the national and

international level. We play a leading role in the interregional initiative aimed at the adoption of a new optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Slovakia fully supports the fight to end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes under international law, such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. As a facilitator for the universality and implementation of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, we actively work towards increasing the number of States Parties to the Rome Statute and towards its proper implementation.

Slovakia closely watches the situation and problems in individual regions of the world.

The long-term effort to reach lasting peace in the Middle East has failed to yield the expected results. At this stage, we appreciate the contributions of all facilitators involved in reconciling the demands of both sides by way of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks that were launched recently. We are hopeful that the Palestinian and Israeli leaders will find a way of coming to an agreement that will lay down the final arrangement of their mutual relations. This is necessary for world peace.

Africa, as the most troubled continent, continues to call for special attention by the international community. We need to address the origin and the essence of the problems, not only their consequences. On the other hand, we are pleased to see the progress made in the stabilization and development of countries such as Ghana, Benin, Togo, Mauritius and others.

As members of the United Nations, we all have to support respect for the binding nature of Security Council resolutions — particularly when it comes to preserving peace around the globe. For this reason, we support diplomatic negotiations on the Iran issue, as well as on the situation on the Korean peninsula, which is a matter of concern.

Slovakia welcomed the conclusions of the Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan. The Conference marked a new phase of partnership between the Afghan Government and the international community, based on the principle of a gradual Afghanistanization of the country, that is, the transition to full Afghan leadership and responsibility to be achieved in the Kabul Process. Slovakia will continue to participate in the stabilization and development of Afghanistan by contributing to NATO- and EU-led stabilization and training operations and by implementing humanitarian and development aid projects.

Slovakia remains a staunch supporter of a peaceful and just settlement of the Cyprus issue under the auspices of the Secretary-General. More than 20 years of our support for negotiations and the continued involvement, since 2001, of the largest contingent of the Slovak armed forces in the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus within the United Nations crisis management operations, bear witness to our engagement in this respect.

As for the Western Balkans, we are looking to strengthen stability and support democratic processes. We wish for the European integration processes of the Western Balkan countries to move forward. We also wish for the Balkans to see peace agreements and not imposed solutions.

The United Nations must be able to effectively respond to the current challenges of the twenty-first century. This calls for synergies across all United Nations bodies, programmes, funds and specialized agencies. But, more importantly, since Member States determine their activities and their direction, we need to build synergies among us. The people of our countries are looking to see positive results.

I am confident that, under the Assembly President's leadership, the United Nations will make great strides in advancing its cause.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Slovak Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ivan Gašparovič, President of the Slovak Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein, Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

The Acting President: The Assembly will hear an address by the Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein, Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein, Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

King Abdullah: More than ever before, our world is confronting multiple global crises which cannot be effectively addressed without a coordinated, multilateral action. No country can face these crises and provide for its future in isolation. The threats are global, and so are the solutions. A strong, central role for the United Nations is essential.

It is also essential to resist forces of division that spread misunderstanding and mistrust, especially among peoples of different religions. The fact is that humanity everywhere is bound together, not only by mutual interests, but by shared commandments: to love God and neighbour; to love the good and neighbour.

This week, my delegation, with the support of our friends on every continent, will introduce a draft resolution for an annual World Interfaith Harmony Week. What we propose is a special week during which the world's people, in their own places of worship, could express the teachings of their own faith about tolerance, respect for the other, and peace. I hope that the draft resolution will have the Assembly's support.

Another critical area for United Nations leadership is peace — and one peace hangs in the balance today. With direct negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, a door opens to a final, two-State settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. And the establishment of an independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel, will pave the way for a comprehensive regional peace. An end to this conflict is long overdue.

No regional crisis has had a longer or broader impact on global security and stability. No such crisis has been longer on the United Nations agenda, or has frustrated peacemakers more. Every resource spent in this conflict is a resource lost for investing in progress and prosperity. Every day spent is a day lost to forces of violence and extremism that threaten all of us in the region and beyond.

People are wary of disappointment, and spoilers are doing everything they can to make us fail. We cannot underestimate the importance of success, or the painful cost of failure. All of us need to support swift action, hard choices and real results. The alternative is more suffering and deeper frustrations, with spreading, more-vicious warfare. Such a catastrophic scenario will continue to drag in the whole world, threatening security and stability far beyond the borders of the Middle East. To prevent that, the talks must be approached with commitment, sincerity and courage.

There should be no provocative or unilateral actions that can derail the negotiations. Instead, the parties must work hard to produce results, and quickly. That means addressing all final-status issues, with a view to ending the occupation and reaching the two-State solution, the only solution that can work, as soon as possible. The status quo is simply unacceptable — enough injustice, enough bloodshed.

Jordan and the rest of the Arab and Muslim world are committed. In the Arab Peace Initiative, we reach out to Israel with an unprecedented opportunity for a comprehensive settlement, a settlement that will enable Israel to have normal relations with 57 Arab and Muslim States, one third of the United Nations. Now we reach out to our fellow members of this United Nations. All stand to lose if the talks fail; all gain when peace is achieved. Our global and collective influence is key. Together we must tip the balance towards peace.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for the statement he has just made.

His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein, Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Acting President: The Assembly will hear an address by the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Kabila Kabange (*spoke in French*): I begin by congratulating Mr. Joseph Deiss on his election to preside over the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and I also congratulate his entire Bureau on their election. I also congratulate the President's predecessor, Mr. Ali Treki, on the devotion and skill with which he carried out his mandate, to great general satisfaction.

Finally, I pay a heartfelt tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his praiseworthy, tireless efforts to uphold and promote the purposes and principles of the Charter. The Democratic Republic of the Congo thanks him for having agreed to be present in Kinshasa during the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of our accession to independence. This is proof of his commitment and that of the United Nations, together with the Congolese people, in the search for peace, stability and development. My country reaffirms its determination to support him in his efforts to bring about a world that is safer for all of us.

The President took the Chair.

This session is being held at a time of particular difficulty for all humanity, which is in crisis, marked by challenges to the basic principles of international relations, worsened by the self-interest of nations. The outcome document adopted yesterday on accelerating implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, while being a message of hope, nevertheless gives a sense of the gap separating the wealthy countries from the poor countries as we seek better living conditions for our peoples.

The food crisis and famine afflict many peoples of the planet. Endemic diseases that had almost disappeared are now resurfacing, and new scourges are appearing. In particular, we see a plethora of natural disasters in the wake of climate change, which is proving to be even more devastating.

The grim picture that I have just painted should motivate us to be more united in mobilizing our efforts in a spirit of constructive solidarity in order to find agreed, comprehensive solutions measuring up to the vast challenges that we must meet.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo makes a pressing appeal to all States to work together at long last for a better world, while tirelessly trying to bring peace wherever areas of tension persist.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo also commends all the efforts made by a number of States under the auspices of the United Nations to restore peace, security, democracy and development to certain regions of the Middle East, the Balkans, the Horn of Africa, Central Africa and other regions of the world.

My country is emerging from a multifaceted crisis worsened by the various wars that ravaged it until recently. Like many other African nations, it also suffers from the harmful consequences of the global economic and financial crisis. As I told my people on 30 June, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of our independence, poverty and a precarious situation are neither inevitable nor irreversible.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo wants the next 50 years to be much brighter and more promising. It undertakes, to that end, to make its contribution to the forward march of humankind towards a better world.

With respect to the global challenges of preserving the planet, my country, wondrously endowed and blessed by nature, reaffirms its solemn commitment to defend its biodiversity in its policies and its national development plan.

The Government of my country, whose forests provide the world with its second set of "lungs", believes that the issue of climate change and the environment will require the establishment of a global environment authority, which should involve both public and private institutions, civil society and scientific circles.

With respect to establishing and consolidating peace, my country welcomes the Secretary-General's acceptance of our request to establish in Libreville in the Republic of Gabon a United Nations office for Central Africa, which clearly will help bring the United Nations closer and ensure better coordination between it and the countries of the region. Issues of peace, security, humanitarian assistance and development will be considered speedily, and implementation of measures adopted will receive the necessary urgency.

It is up to us to consolidate peace everywhere, through international and regional mechanisms and

instruments for the maintenance of peace and the prevention and settlement of conflict.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is resolved to eradicate the phenomenon of foreign armed groups in its national territory. This is the framework in which should be understood the military operations that we have carried out systematically since 2009 to force such groups to lay down their arms for good. Due to military pressures and awareness-raising and outreach campaigns, and also because the were displace far from their own borders of origin, the volunteer repatriations have intensified and will continue to do so.

The question of the Lord's Resistance Army is no longer a matter of defence; rather, it is now a matter of public order. Nevertheless, given the crimes and atrocities that it still commits against our civilian populations, we shall remain mobilized and vigilant. The ultimate aim is to put that group in a situation in which it can no longer do any harm.

Together with our efforts to eradicate the insecurity in the eastern part of our national territory, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is working to strengthen the rule of law, democracy and good governance.

With respect to justice in particular, I should like to dwell a little on the ordeal of Congolese women in the Provinces of North and South Kivu. The lack of security is the primary cause of the tragedy. Armed groups, which benefit from the illegal exploitation of raw materials, are at the very root of the scourge. We have decided upon appropriate measures to address this unacceptable situation.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is now addressing the causes of the violence against women and the causes of recurrent conflict. At the same time, it is enhancing its judiciary in order to address together peace, justice and security. The fight against impunity continues to be of prime importance in Government actions.

My Government is working within the framework of achieving the Millennium Development Goals to do its utmost to meet the basic needs of our people: health, education, food self-sufficiency, basic infrastructures, electricity and drinking water for all, not to mention fighting malaria, HIV/AIDS and poverty. I appreciate the commitment of our partners who are supporting us in achieving my country's development priorities.

Because of the complex nature of the various tasks that need to be carried out on our territory of more than several million square kilometres, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a vast building site, requiring multiple contributions for reconstruction and modernization. Such contributions are welcome, particularly in the framework of a partnership that we want to be respectful and proactive with the private sector.

Today the economic indicators are changing in a positive manner. Several key actions have been successfully taken. The credit for this success, which gives us the means for a new start, lies above all with the Congolese people. It also stems from the valuable contributions and cooperation of our partners.

With regard to political and administrative management, we plan to hold presidential and legislative elections in 2011. My Government is making it a point of honour to consolidate democracy by respecting electoral time frames, ensuring accountability of the highest order and completing the establishment of the institutions provided for by the Constitution within the framework of the decentralization process.

My country supports the process of reforming our universal Organization. The Democratic Republic of the Congo reaffirms that the Member States should work resolutely within that trend. United Nations reform, including Security Council reform, should therefore be undertaken without delay, because that would support the achievement of our dreams, given the new challenges and changes that affect our planet.

Expansion of the Security Council is a democratic requirement. This vision needs to be strengthened by affirming the authority of the General Assembly, in order to enable its President to play a key role in the quest for solutions to the problems of our time.

It is said that nature will give man only those challenges that are within the reach of his creative potential, which has produced tremendous inventions. Despite our diversity, the time has now come to put our human resources at the service of our collective creativity.

We should not leave the controls of the global economy to unbridled capitalism, which recognizes no

regulation of movements of capital, and is motivated only by the profit motive. It is our duty also to globalize the universal values of justice, solidarity and altruism that contribute to international peace and security.

Together we can give humanity better times, if day after day we work to achieve the ideals of our Organization.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Aliyev: I have the honour to join previous speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the post of President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session; I wish you every success in that highly responsible post. I would like as well to thank your predecessor, Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, for his productive work. I also express my profound respect and gratitude to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his leadership and dedication in reviving the Organization.

Azerbaijan recognizes the central role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security, promoting sustainable development and advocating fundamental freedoms for the people of the world. Azerbaijan believes that the United Nations has to be stronger and more capable in engaging in a range of global issues in every part of the world, as well as in addressing the aspirations and concerns of each Member State.

As a country suffering from the devastation of war and occupation, Azerbaijan strongly believes that faithful observance of universally accepted norms and principles of international law concerning good-neighbourliness, friendly relations, cooperation among States and the fulfilment in good faith of the obligations assumed by States are of the greatest importance for the maintenance of international peace and security. The ongoing armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan still represents a major threat to international and regional peace and security. The conflict has resulted in the occupation of one fifth of the territory of Azerbaijan and has made approximately one out of every nine people in my country an internally displaced person or a refugee.

It has been internationally recognized that the Republic of Armenia bears the primary responsibility for occupying Azerbaijan's territories, committing the most serious international crimes during the conflict, carrying out ethnic cleansing and trying to create a mono-ethnic culture in the captured Azerbaijani territories. The Security Council has adopted four resolutions and has expressed its full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territories. It has also recognized that Nagorny Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan and has called for the immediate, full and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The General Assembly and other international organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, have adopted similar positions. Unfortunately, despite the consolidated position of the international community, Azerbaijani territories continue to remain under occupation.

Armenia so far, instead of negotiating in good faith with a view to finding a durable solution to the conflict as soon as possible, has preferred escalation, with unpredictable consequences. Despite ongoing political efforts towards the earliest possible resolution of the conflict, activities in the occupied areas of Azerbaijan are in gross violation of international law and serve to further consolidate the current status quo of the occupation, securing the results of ethnic

cleansing and colonization of the captured territories, and causing serious obstruction to the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Thus, over the period since the beginning of the conflict, significant numbers of settlers have been encouraged to move into the occupied areas depopulated of their Azerbaijani inhabitants. In 2005 OSCE dispatched a fact-finding mission to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, which found evidence of the presence of settlers there and made a call to discourage any further settlement of the occupied territory of Azerbaijan. Measures are also being consistently undertaken by Armenia with the purpose of altering the historical and cultural features of the occupied areas in an attempt to remove any signs testifying to their original Azerbaijani cultural and historical roots. As a result, not a single Azerbaijani historic or cultural monument has been left undamaged and no sacred site has escaped vandalism in the occupied territories. Implantation of settlers as well as destruction and appropriation of the historical and cultural heritage in the occupied areas, along with various other forms of illegal activity there, directly affect the property rights of internally displaced persons.

The lack of agreement on political issues, the protracted nature of the conflict and prolonged negotiations should not be used as pretexts for not addressing other problems deriving from continued and deliberate disrespect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law in connection with the conflict.

The earliest possible resolution of the armed conflict in and around the Nagorny Karabakh region of Azerbaijan remains a primary task for us. The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries are engaged in efforts to bring peace and stability to the region. Resolution of the conflict envisages the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories within a fixed time framework, restoration of all communications, return of all refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin, international security guarantees, including peacekeeping forces, and interim status for Nagorny Karabakh. We are ready to continue the talks in good faith for finalizing the status of Nagorny Karabakh within the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The step-by-step approach introduced to Armenia and Azerbaijan in December 2009 by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs is accepted by Azerbaijan in principle as a basis for achieving a lasting resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorny Karabakh conflict. Unfortunately, Armenia is still delaying a definite answer to the Co-Chairs' proposal.

Azerbaijan highly appreciates the principled stand of Member States on issues of vital importance for Azerbaijan pertaining to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We rely on the continued solidarity of the international community with the just position of Azerbaijan and on valuable support for our initiatives within the United Nations, aimed at addressing the existing challenges in an impartial, open and comprehensive manner.

Despite the unresolved conflict over Nagorny Karabakh and occupied territories, the Government of Azerbaijan has succeeded in guaranteeing political stability, democratic development, economic prosperity and social welfare in the country. Today, Azerbaijan is one of the most rapidly developing economies in the world. Within the last five years alone, Azerbaijan has nearly tripled its gross domestic product. The strategic geographic location of Azerbaijan at the intersection of major trade routes along the emerging East-West and North-South transport and energy corridors provides an important asset to turn the country into an energy and infrastructure hub.

Azerbaijan possesses considerable proven oil and natural gas reserves and has good prospects for new discoveries. Modern infrastructure for transporting hydrocarbons to international markets has already been created in Azerbaijan and has been used for exporting oil and natural gas, which can diversify supply sources and strengthen international energy security. This is particularly crucial for gas supplies. With proven reserves of 2 trillion cubic metres of natural gas and a potential of up to 5 trillion cubic metres or, and perhaps even more, Azerbaijan is ready to provide its own contribution to ensure the stable development of the world natural gas market.

Another globally important project, on which Azerbaijan is working very intensively with its neighbours is building and enhancing the regional railroad infrastructure. This railroad connection will open an enormous opportunity for transporting all kinds of cargo between Asia and Europe.

As a very active member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, Azerbaijan, in an open and transparent manner, uses its energy revenues for the development of the country, particularly in building human capital and working to eradicate reducing poverty. Thus, we were able to achieve a dramatic poverty reduction, from 49 per cent in 2003 to 11 per cent in 2009. And I strongly believe that through sustainable development Azerbaijan will attain even more in this field in upcoming years.

Azerbaijan has always been a place of coexistence and tolerance among different faiths, ethnic groups and philosophies. As an active member of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations, Azerbaijan contributes to the promotion of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding. Azerbaijan hosted the World Summit of Religious Leaders, with participants from 32 States, in the spring of this year and has put forward an initiative to host a world forum for intercultural dialogue in April 2011.

One of the most serious and long-term challenges that can affect every part of the globe is climate change. We in Azerbaijan proclaimed 2010 a year of ecology and adopted various special programmes in the field of environmental protection.

Azerbaijan demonstrates full support and undertakes ceaseless efforts for the promotion of sustainable development and global prosperity for all, paying particular attention to addressing the special needs and vulnerabilities of the developing and least developed countries, as well as of those who are recovering from natural disasters. Azerbaijan will continue to contribute to the realization of the Millennium development goals and objectives agreed within the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly I would like to thank the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal, President of the Republic of Panama

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Panama.

Mr. Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal, President of the Republic of Panama, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Martinelli Berrocal (*spoke in Spanish*): I congratulate you, Sir, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session. We fully endorse your proposal to analyse the central role of the United Nations in global governance. The United Nations is the international forum in which to exchange ideas and adopt measures that strengthen the pillars upon which our governance stands.

Panama's geography has allowed my country to serve as a bridge between and meeting point of the most diverse cultures and civilizations. Thanks to the discovery of our special privileged position in 1513 and the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, today we connect Europe, the Americas and the East. That is how our story has been written. Five hundred years later, we are still working for the benefit of the world's maritime commerce.

Our ethnic diversity is a symbol and example of our national unity. Panama is committed to promoting economic growth and social justice. We make possible the peaceful coexistence of all ethnicities and creeds. We Panamanians love peace, and we manage our canal with scrupulous careful neutrality. Our foreign policy is defined by respect, the defence and promotion of democracy, human rights, and international peace and international security, all within the framework of the doctrine of human security.

Panama has played an active role in favour of the international community at important United Nations forums. Among these are the Security Council, the Commission on Human Rights, the Human Rights Committee, and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Our pacifism does not

imply passivity in the face of situations that affect international security and the governance of peoples. Change is in the air all over the globe. People demand even more of their public servants. Our political and diplomatic activities are founded on the principles of international cooperation and the strengthening of global multilateralism.

Trafficking in drugs, weapons, human organs and persons — associated with illegal migration — as well as money-laundering, banditryism and terrorism are the work of criminal organizations that seek to destabilize our democracies. The trafficking and illegal possession of weapons have a devastating effect on human security and governance in our countries.

For Panama and the Central American region, drugs are our weapons of mass destruction and are a vital issue. Drug traffickers filter through our land and sea borders, polluting our young people with their poison. Additionally, our region is being used by networks of human traffickers that steer mixed migratory flows of persons from other continents through our borders.

In the face of these challenges, my country and the other members of the Central American Integration System have decided to create a regional security coordination centre. These regional efforts to fight transnational organized crime, based in my country, are already yielding encouraging results.

We understand that it is vital to work jointly to improve the functioning of international institutions, for the benefit of humanity. In this regard, I find it a very positive sign for the region that President Porfirio Lobo of Honduras is participating fully in this Assembly. In order to count on a world that is more stable and secure, we must set aside our differences. Stability requires us to work together to strengthen human security, both regionally and globally.

Globalization has entered a period of convergence among the diverse various economies; this will continue for some years. While the previous stage of globalization lasted some 60 years, we believe that the one that began in 1990 will conclude its readjustments by mid-century. It is also necessary to note that as a result of this process of convergence, we have suffered during the past two years the effects of a significant crisis.

This global crisis demands newer and better forms of government for our societies. This global crisis demands the expansion of our markets and better management of our intergovernmental relations. In this context, we appreciate the efforts towards developing the exchange of goods, workers, tourists and investments across the China Straits, which offer a new thrust to achieving the full potential of our trade relations with that region.

For its part, Panama is also expanding its trade relations through the negotiation of free trade agreements with Peru and Colombia. We are also actively pursuing free trade agreements negotiated with Canada, and the United States of America and an association agreement between Central America and the European Union. Accordingly, I wish to take this opportunity to ask for the support of all Governments involved, with a view toward their approval and ratification of all these treaties.

We are on the threshold of an era of economic growth and opportunity in Latin America. Thus, we renew our commitment to a more just and inclusive free trade that offers economic opportunities and prosperity to all our peoples. With change and reform sweeping the region, we have more than enough reasons to promote a new age of cooperation and working together. Together, we can seize this opportunity and successfully face our common challenges.

Panama enjoys very healthy and strong relations with its main partner, the United States of America — a partner that is committed to our region's success. Such an engaged partner is crucial for the region's success. On both trade and security issues, the United States is and always has been an ally and a willing friend.

Additionally, we understand that for the comprehensive development of trade relations and the strengthening of our economies, more measures are required to ensure effective tax collection. To this end, Panama has signed agreements to avoid double taxation and prevent tax evasion. This is part of a national strategy that seeks to strengthen transparency and the competitiveness of our country's international services. We have already signed agreements with Mexico, Barbados and Portugal, and a while ago with the State of Qatar. We have also concluded negotiations with Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Luxembourg, the Republic of Korea and Singapore.

We want to offer the Panamanian experience as an example to the world. It is an economic story of reform at home along with strong international trade and business relations across the region; these have had excellent results and have proved fruitful.

The Government of Panama welcomes the adoption of resolution 65/1, entitled "Keeping the promise: — united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals", and, at the same time, we reaffirm our commitment to that document.

In a little less than a year in Government, we have developed structural reforms and programmes to meet the needs of our people, focusing particularly on society's most vulnerable groups. Among these programmes, allow me to highlight one that consists of grants to elderly people who lack retirement funds or pensions. Additionally, we have established a system of universal scholarships to support our young people with a monthly stipend from the first to the twelfth grades. Whether the student attends a public school or a private school with modest tuition fees, the State is reducing the dropout rate and strengthening relationships among teachers, parents and students.

Moreover, in December 2009, we decreed the highest largest minimum wage increase in the past 50 years. We are thus helping workers in the private and public sectors who were earning very low wages. Additionally, we established a solidarity fund to assist Panamanians of limited means in buying their first home.

Panama will invest more than $13 billion in public infrastructure over the next five years. This effort will include the building of hospitals, the development of roads, the expansion of Tocumen International Airport, the building of other airports, and the establishment of the MetroBus, as well as the construction of a modern subway system in Panama City. That first subway line will raise the quality of life for Panamanian families, who will thus have more time to share and strengthen family values.

These projects, together with the expansion of the Canal and the responsible and sustainable exploitation of our natural resources, will cost more than $20 billion in the coming years and will generate thousands of jobs that the country so sorely needs. All of these public works projects will be developed with the highest environmental standards and will contribute to a more dynamic economy for Panama and the region as a whole.

The theme chosen for this debate could not be more appropriate; we concur that the United Nations has a calling to play a central role in global governance. To that end, we need to deepen the process of reforms begun within the Organization. Panama is committed to making its contribution to this process, placing its geographical position and its logistics infrastructure at the service of the Organization.

In this regard, my Government has two key projects, namely, the establishment of a United Nations inter-agency centre for Latin America and the Caribbean and the creation of a regional logistics centre for humanitarian assistance, both to be located in Panama. The first will promote more coherence and synergy between all regional offices, with greater efficiency in the use of resources. The second will improve the regional capacity to respond to natural disasters and humanitarian crises, and will be the site of warehouses for the United Nations, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

We reaffirm our conviction that the United Nations is the international forum for the exchange of ideas and for adopting measures that strengthen the pillars upon which world governance rests. The United Nations is also a forum of goodwill where nations can work together on shared goals. In our region that means jobs, opportunity and security for our peoples. It also means modernizing economies, reforming the Government, and ensuring social well-being.

Panama is a good example of this success. Today, my country reaffirms its belief in and solidarity with the United Nations system. I say this unambiguously and with great certainty. We are fully prepared and willing to offer all the peoples of the planet the best possible service and utility and, as a product of that, to develop our citizens. That is Panama's mission, and we will accomplish it.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Panama for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon.

Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Biya (*spoke in French*): I would like first to extend my hearty congratulations to you, Sir, on your unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session. With your rich experience in international affairs, we believe you will succeed in your task. I would also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Ali Abdussalem Treki, for his commitment and skill in discharging his challenging functions during the previous session, and I convey to him my special thanks.

I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his aides for their untiring efforts in the service of peace and development throughout the world, particularly in the least developed countries.

As the first decade of the twenty-first century draws to a close, it is certainly worthwhile to review the ground covered since we proclaimed, some 10 years ago in this very Hall, our common resolve to cut poverty in half by 2015, worldwide. We all recall the enthusiasm engendered by that solemn commitment.

Today, we are forced to note that we are still quite far off the track. More than one billion people are still living in extreme poverty. The development gap between the countries of the North and those of the South continues to widen instead of narrowing. International assistance is stagnating and remains below the level of commitment made by developed countries to devote 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to it. The results in the eight priority areas of the Millennium Development Goals are disappointing, even unsatisfactory, while the deadline of 2015 is just around the corner.

So what happened? The economic crisis caused by the recent upheavals in financial markets is certainly to blame. The slowdown in activity worldwide — and, in some cases, recession — monopolized the attention of the countries of the North. They gave priority to reviving their own economies and solving their own social problems. However, even though we can understand that, it does not explain everything.

In fact, the awareness shown at the turn of the century of the disastrous consequences of deepening poverty in the third world seems to have waned significantly. Yet the situation has not only failed to improve, it continues to deteriorate. On several occasions, from this rostrum and elsewhere, I have drawn the attention of the international community to the problem posed by the growth in poverty worldwide. I have pointed out that, for ethical reasons, it behooves us all to express solidarity with the most underprivileged. I have further indicated that this is, of course, in everyone's interests, for the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor can only exacerbate tensions and jeopardize international peace and security.

I will be pardoned, I am sure, if I dwell a little on the case of Africa. It is undeniably the continent most affected by extreme poverty, which is generally accompanied by food shortages, epidemics, population movements and insecurity. Is it any wonder, then, that such profound misery sometimes explodes, as was the case two years ago during what were dubbed the food riots? The international community cannot remain indifferent to such a threat, which could undermine our efforts to advance democracy and ensure our development.

Let me make myself clear. It is not a matter of engaging in recriminations for the sake of any ideology, of ascribing motives to this or that country or group of countries, or of sermonizing. I am the first to acknowledge that the United Nations and its agencies have provided assistance and guidance to our continent since independence; that most countries of the North have, through their cooperation, financial assistance and debt cancellation, lent and continue to lend irreplaceable support to Africa; and that emerging countries have taken over. We are, of course, grateful to all of them.

However, that obviously is not enough. I am not trying to apportion blame for this state of affairs. I merely want to say that the solutions applied were perhaps not the best. I would add that from the African perspective, we have been burdened with too many historical handicaps — slavery, colonization, economic dependence and internal and external conflicts — and, of course, that we have lacked toughness and steadiness of mind.

For reasons of mutual interest mentioned earlier, I think we should review the issue thoroughly, without ulterior ideological motives or political or economic prejudices. No matter what is said, Africa has changed significantly over the past 50 years and seems to me to be ready for a wide-ranging ideological debate on the issue, provided that it is conducted in a true spirit of partnership. Through this approach we can realize the famous Marshall Plan for Africa, which is often mentioned but has yet to see the light of day.

That concern led Cameroon to organize an international conference — Africa 21 — in Yaoundé on the occasion of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of its achieving sovereignty. At that conference the 50 years of African independence were objectively assessed and the future opportunities for our continent were evaluated. The conference was attended by several Heads of State and Government, former Prime Ministers, high-level representatives of international organizations, experts of world renown, major corporate executives and Nobel Peace Prize winners.

The final declaration of the conference, which my delegation has made available, can serve as a kind of guide for the rehabilitation of Africa, with regard to both its economic recovery and its participation in international life. That is what it is all about — ensuring that our continent does not remain forever aid-dependent and that it plays its rightful role in international affairs.

Allow me, in this Hall, to emphasize the second point. How can we today explain why Africa is the only continent without a permanent member on the Security Council? How can we explain that Africa is unable to make its voice heard when its problems are examined in global economic and financial bodies while the decisions made there will be imposed on it? At a time when emerging countries are rightly calling for a seat on the Security Council commensurate with their economic and political weight, Africa as a whole should not be forgotten.

For a long time our continent has been treated, I dare say, as an object of international relations. Yet, it is directly affected by most of the major problems confronting humanity today, be they migratory flows, global warming, economic and financial regulation, terrorism, et cetera. In short, it is sometimes the victim of phenomena for which it is not responsible. From that standpoint also, there is a need to get out of the rut in which major negotiations appear to be bogged down.

Africans seek more understanding and sympathy in the true sense of the words. The delayed development from which they suffer cannot be reduced to the Millennium Goals. Admittedly, they want to be less poor and to eat their fill, but above all, to be protected from fear and want, to be freer and to imagine a future without anxiety. In short, they want to live in a society that guarantees them those minimum conditions for existence and well-being.

Most African countries have embarked on this path. For its part, over the last decades Cameroon has set up representative institutions, established the rule of law and ensured respect for human rights. On the economic and social front, significant progress has been made in the areas of public finance, education and health. Should this trend continue, our country can expect, in the medium term, to attain the status of an emerging country.

That to me seems to be the mindset of most African countries. Certainly, the international community has a role to play in supporting them in their effort to join the global society. To that end, the international community needs to show more understanding, solidarity and, of course, more fraternity.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Cameroon for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Sebastian Piñera Echeñique, President of the Republic of Chile

The President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Chile.

Mr. Sebastian Piñera Echeñique, President of the Republic of Chile, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Sebastian Piñera Echeñique, President of the Republic of Chile, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Piñera Echeñique (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to begin by conveying our heartfelt congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election to guide the work of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session. Your human and professional qualities are a guarantee of success in the Assembly's important tasks.

I come to this rostrum as the representative of Chile, a country that is far away on the map but that is inhabited by a people that is close and that is in solidarity and brotherhood; a country geographically narrow but with a big and generous heart; a country physically surrounded by an arid desert to the north, majestic mountains to the east, a huge sea to the west and the magnificent Antarctica to the south. Despite that, it is a people with a permanent and steadfast commitment and calling to integration in the world. It is a country that like many others has experienced division and discord among its children but that is today fully united and reconciled; a country with a fearless and earthy character but possessing indomitable determination and valour; a country of warriors and heroes but that has enjoyed uninterrupted peace for 130 years. It is a young country but with age-old institutions, and it views the present with confidence and the future with optimism.

Chile is a country that today is living through times that are historic and dramatic and offer enormous opportunities. I say historic times because only five days ago we commemorated our two-hundredth anniversary of independence and opened the doors to our third century of republican life. We did so as one big family saluting the same flag, honouring the same heroes and singing the same national anthem irrespective of our political ideas, religious beliefs, ethnic origin or economic situation.

But Chile is also living through dramatic times of adversity and sadness. A few months ago our country suffered one of the five worst earthquakes in human history, followed by tidal waves on our coastlines. Five hundred and twenty-one of our fellow citizens lost their lives and many are still missing. More than 2 million Chileans were affected. Entire cities and villages were demolished. Hundreds of hospitals, clinics, bridges and ports are still unusable. One of every three children — 1.25 million — were unable to return to school because the schools had been destroyed or badly damaged. Total losses amounted to about $30 billion, equivalent to about 18 per cent of our national product. Without doubt, it was the largest catastrophe with the biggest damage ever suffered by our country in the history of its 200 years of independence.

But from those ruins rose a people united in solidarity. After a mere 45 days all children and young people had returned to school. In only 60 days we were able to restore proper health-care services in the affected areas. In only 90 days we had built more emergency housing than we had built throughout our country's prior history. In 100 days we had entirely restored connections, providing full or partial services to airports, ports, roads, bridges — everything the earthquake had destroyed. In 120 days our economy had recovered the capacity to grow and create employment with greater strength than ever.

Certainly, reconstruction has only just begun and will require years of effort. But to that end we will continue to work tirelessly until we have rebuilt the last school, the last hospital or the last home that had been destroyed. Because for a country such as Chile, which has been shaped by adversity, determination and hard work, however difficult a crisis may be or how painful its consequences, it always represents an opportunity — the opportunity to build a better country together.

In addition to being historic and dramatic, these are times of enormous opportunities. That is because this generation of Chileans — the bicentennial generation — is in position to fulfil the dream our parents and grandparents had always cherished but never achieved. That dream is to succeed in making Chile, before the end of this decade, a country able to

defeat poverty, to defeat underdevelopment and to create opportunities for material and spiritual development for all of its children, which Chile has never before known.

How will we do this? First, by strengthening the three basic pillars so that development germinates and opportunities flourish. At the political level that requires a stable, participatory, transparent and vital democracy; at the economic level, a social market economy open to the world and trusting unreservedly in the economic entrepreneurship and creativity of its citizens; and at the social level, a State that is strong and effective in the fight against poverty and in promoting greater equality of opportunities.

But we will build upon rock, and not upon sand. What was done before is insufficient. We must strengthen the pillars of society, knowledge and information. I am thinking about the development of our human capital, which is the greatest wealth we possess. We must encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, which are the only truly renewable and inexhaustible natural resources that we have. We must invest in science and technology, which will create unimaginable opportunities for the future we all face, and we must promote more dynamic and flexible markets and institutions in order to confront the changes and opportunities that have become the challenges of the modern world.

For those reasons, almost 65 years ago, Chile, together with 50 other countries, attended the formation of this United Nations, whose goal was to maintain peace, security and international cooperation. That was the post-war period, when our planet was crossed and divided by two walls. One was the iron curtain running from north to south, dividing the world for a long time into two irreconcilable blocs, each with sufficient war-making capacity to annihilate our planet several times over. But there was another wall, the one running from east to west, which separated the rich and prosperous countries of the North from the poor and underdeveloped nations of the South.

Both walls fell before our eyes as the sun set on the twentieth century. The first wall was in Berlin, in Central Europe, and the second one in Silicon Valley, Bangalore, Singapore, New Zealand and in the main technological centres throughout the world. But the fall of these walls uncovered a third wall, less visible than the previous ones but equally or more harmful and damaging. That wall has existed in our countries and peoples forever, separating the older souls who live in nostalgia and fear the future from the young souls who are creative and entrepreneurial and embrace the future fearlessly and always believe that the best is still to come.

That wall prevented many of our nations from joining the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. That explains why there are still underdeveloped countries while others, fewer in number, managed to demolish that wall in time and to join that revolution.

But today we are confronted by a new revolution, more powerful and more significant than the Industrial Revolution: the revolution of knowledge, technology and the information society. It has been knocking at our doors for several years. It will be very generous to the countries that want to embrace it, but tremendously indifferent and even cruel to those that ignore it or simply let it pass. And in order to deepen our integration and to govern globalization better — lest globalization should end up governing us — the crisis must be addressed differently.

The financial crisis has ceased to be a national problem and has acquired regional and often global implications. The evils of modern society such as terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime know no frontiers or territories or jurisdictions. And any attempts to effectively tackle global warming, natural disasters, health emergencies, hunger or extreme poverty are going to require action that is much more attentive, concerted and effective on the part of the community of nations.

So the United Nations and other institutions deriving from the Bretton Woods consensus, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, urgently need to modernize and adapt to the new times if they want to play a leading role and not be mere spectators of events to which we will be witnesses and principal actors. Those new times are the changes already taking place in this new century.

As in 1945, when Chile participated in the creation of this Organization, and with the authority conferred on us by the fact of having actively participated in each one of its forums — peacekeeping operations and humanitarian missions — today we also want to participate in encouraging and promoting the great reform and modernization that the United Nations

and the international order require. That must be done by creating a much more demanding and efficient institution in terms of goals and expectations, one more flexible and effective in structure and more determined and committed in the defence of the ideals for which it was created.

In other words, we need a United Nations able to meet the challenges and needs of the twenty-first century, which we all know are genuine peace, sustainable progress and respect for the dignity of all those who inhabit our planet. Such reforms require modernizing the Security Council so that it is more pluralistic and representative of the new global reality. In this regard, we reiterate our appeal for the incorporation of other emerging countries, such as Brazil, on our own continent.

I should also like to take this opportunity to offer my very sincere congratulations to my predecessor as President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, on her recent appointment as Under-Secretary-General for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and to express my pride and that of my whole nation at the fact that a compatriot will be head of a global effort to achieve greater equality between men and women. I am sure that, given her human and professional qualities, she will lead the new gender entity brilliantly and effectively.

I also wish to reaffirm our commitment to the principles that have always governed and guided our foreign policy, including full respect for international law, the inviolability of treaties, the juridical equality of States, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the self-determination of peoples, which are unquestionably essential foundations of international stability and peaceful coexistence among nations.

I also stress the importance of the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights at all times, in all places and in all circumstances, and our lasting commitment to multilateralism and open regionalism that promote constructive and more cooperative economic practices among the countries of the world and of our region. Chile will never cease to raise its voice in all international gatherings and forums to defend these principles.

Here at the United Nations today, I also wish to sincerely recognize the aboriginal peoples who inhabited our lands thousands of years before the European explorers and conquistadors arrived. We are very proud to be a multicultural nation, but we recognize that we failed for centuries to give our aboriginal peoples the opportunities they deserved and needed. That is why we in Chile are promoting the constitutional recognition of all our aboriginal peoples, abandoning the strategy of assimilation and moving towards that of integration. Such a strategy respects, values and protects their languages, culture and traditions, which are part of our deepest national wealth. Along with this constitutional recognition, we have established a dialogue involving the Government, civil society and our aboriginal peoples, in particular the Mapuche, to strengthen the agenda for historic rediscovery with the most powerful initiative ever launched in Chile on this subject — the Araucanía Plan.

I would also like to recall that only weeks ago my country was shaken by an event heard around the world. A rockslide of more than 100 million tons left 33 miners trapped deep under a mountain in the Atacama desert. From that moment, our Government and country committed themselves body and soul and made their very best efforts to launch a search-and-rescue operation. Seventeen anguishing days later, we were able to reach the trapped miners. They sent up a message that filled all my compatriots' hearts with joy: "We are okay, we are safe, the 33". This represents the whole paradox of our country. We have struggled so hard to save the lives of the 33 miners, and yet at the same time we have 34 Mapuche herders who are on a hunger strike that is killing them.

I wish to conclude by telling those assembled here that the example of courage and perseverance set by our 33 miners will light the path to the future. The future is always an adventure. For pessimists, it means fear; for sceptics, it means doubt; but for all men and women of good will, it always means challenges and opportunities that we must meet together in order to build a better world than the one we inherited from our parents, and which we have a duty to bequeath to our children. That challenge, my friends, is for us, and it is now, because if it is not now, when, and if not for us, then for whom?

The President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Chile for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Sebastian Piñera Echeñique, President of the Republic of Chile, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Bamir Topi, President of the Republic of Albania

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Albania.

Mr. Bamir Topi, President of the Republic of Albania, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Bamir Topi, President of the Republic of Albania, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Topi (*spoke in Albanian; English interpretation provided by the delegation*): It is a special honour for me to address the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly. I would like to congratulate the President on his election to this important position. His experience and continuing commitment strengthen my conviction that he will take the achievements of his predecessor even further. Albania will fully support him as he fulfils his mandate. I take this opportunity to express our special appreciation to the Secretary-General for his continuing efforts to revitalize the global role of the United Nations, as well as to reform the Organization.

Albania is of the view that the role of the United Nations remains powerful, coherent and irreplaceable as the centre of effective global action. It must continue to be encouraged and supported in its efforts to overcome the challenges of achieving open international cooperation, sustainable peace and security, ongoing development and greater respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We live in a global world, interconnected and interdependent, where States and nations must assist and support each other in the search for a comprehensive answer to the common problems and new challenges that we face. Multilateralism remains a priority for the entire international community. In this context, a reformed United Nations — revitalized, dynamic, powerful and effective — is crucial to the complicated process of global governance. In this path of cooperation around the world, the role of the United Nations is irreplaceable, especially in regard to how we make use of our human and material resources.

Rapidly evolving issues throughout the world, each with positive and negative consequences that must inevitably influence the challenges the future will bring, must be given special priority and approached with special care. The United Nations challenging agenda must focus on strengthening peace and security, fighting terrorism, and the issues of stable development, climate change, poverty reduction, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, natural disasters, human rights, migration, and others. Albania remains committed to contributing to this agenda.

The lead role of the Organization and its agencies in administering its budgetary and human resources should be responsive to the requests of Member States. The establishment of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women is the most recent example of tangible success in United Nations reform. Strengthening the role of women in society will not only enhance political life but also help their emancipation and harmonious development.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a priority in our work. Following the adoption of the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2) a decade ago, Albania has advanced towards meeting the MDGs in all areas and with respect to all indicators. It has also made great efforts to incorporate the MDGs into its national development strategy.

We are fully committed to reaching the goals set forth in the acquis communautaire of the European Union (EU), which requires increasing investment in social issues, establishing local and central governance systems, and enhancing development capacity in order to guarantee the ongoing improvement of the well-being of the Albanian people. However, as a full-fledged member of NATO and in the light of its internal democratic stability, Albania is now seeking greater standing in the world as a way to bolster its development in the long term.

Delivering as one is a crucial factor in the reform designed to assist in development around the world. United Nations efforts to establish system-wide coherence offer a real possibility to make the United

Nations more effective. As a pilot country, Albania is a success story, having committed itself fully from the onset. The One United Nations concept in Albania is being developed in complete harmony with national sovereignty and national ownership of development, while responding to the specific needs of the country. The responsibility of being a pilot country further encourages us to make this initiative a success. It is also an opportunity for us to contribute to the overall reform of the United Nations.

Albania has signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations. As a NATO member, Albania is a force for peace and stability in the region. Not only does Albania follow a policy of good-neighbourly relations and strive for the preservation and strengthening of stability in its own region, it also has shown its interest in and commitment to stability and peace in other parts of the world by contributing military and civilian personnel to the peacekeeping missions of various international security organizations and of the United Nations, including the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad and missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. We are thus willing to contribute peacekeeping troops anywhere in the world under the auspices of the United Nations and regional security organizations like NATO.

Terrorism remains a major threat to peace, international security and world order. The fight against terrorism remains a priority that requires great determination resolve. This global threat may be prevented and addressed through collective action, strong responses and the mobilization of all States Members of the United Nations. We must show our nations that, as a part of our responsibility, we shall stand resolute and united against terrorism. Together, we must define a collective platform and strategy for victory in the war against terror by strengthening the international system and order.

We praise and appreciate the work of the Security Council and its committees for their engagement with and active support for Member States through their effective implementation of the Council's counter-terrorism resolutions, in particular resolutions 1269 (1999), 1373 (2001), 1540 (2004) and 1624 (2005). Albania remains fully committed to cooperating with the Security Council in this regard.

Albania appreciates the Secretary-General's contributions to addressing the issue of the Middle East, particularly in the discussions aimed at achieving a sustainable solution acceptable to all parties. All peoples share the desire to live in peace, and Governments have an obligation to guarantee it. We support the relaunched dialogue process and hope that, with the commitment of the international community, the Palestinians and Israelis will take the steps necessary to achieving stable peace in that important region.

Albania believes that the Alliance of Civilizations is a political means for the United Nations to promote peace and harmony among civilizations and to build an inclusive society through education, understanding and mutual knowledge. As a member of the Group of Friends, we shall take active part because we believe in dialogue and contacts among different cultures, in the need to know and respect each other, and in the necessity of defending the unique as part of the richness of the whole. Our approved national strategy for intercultural dialogue and the holding of the Inter-Religious Forum in Tirana in January have served to enrich our experience. However, our participation in the Third Global Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations led us to believe that a better job of fighting stereotypes and prejudice is still needed, as are greater efforts to make modern multicultural societies more cohesive.

Albania's integration into and membership of the European Union is a key priority of our foreign policy, where there has rarely been a broader political and social consensus. The important steps taken by Albania towards EU membership and the phases of cooperation under the framework of the integration process have shown a great deal of potential.

The end of this year promises to be decisive as we approach two decisions of great importance: the completion of the visa liberalization process with the EU and the achievement of candidate status for EU membership. Albanians will finally be able to enjoy the real freedom for which they fought and sacrificed longer and more deeply than any other European nation. The near-unanimous decision of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs to remove the requirement that Albanians obtain visas to enter the EU not only gives us great joy, but also confers greater responsibility on us to fulfil our commitments as we prepare for EU membership.

We guarantee that the seriousness with which we completed the EU questionnaire and our responsible approach to our relations with all European Union institutions and member countries will remain the hallmarks of our efforts to earn the status of candidate country at the earliest possible date.

Albania's membership in NATO and its integration into the European Union are important regional processes inseparable from the full integration of the region. We believe that every Western Balkan country is entitled to play a role in contributing to and assuming responsibility for the integration and emancipation of the region. I am happy to acknowledge that the high level of regional cooperation and political awareness show that the only way forward is through Euro-Atlantic integration.

These are hopeful and promising times, now that the bitter past of that part of Europe has been consigned to history. Albania and Albanians will continue to contribute to stability, security, long-term peace and economic growth by encouraging integration policies related not just to security and economic development, but also to coexistence among countries, peoples and nations, cultures, traditions and history.

A few days ago, a rare occurrence took place in this very Hall with the adoption by consensus of resolution 64/298 on the international legitimacy of the declaration of Kosovo's independence. That was a very important event for Kosovo, Serbia, the Western Balkans, a united Europe and the United Nations. I would like to express my gratitude for the commitment and engagement of all international actors, especially the European Union, which imbued the resolution with the contemporary philosophy and openness of Europe. The European Union showed its cohesiveness and proved that the integration policies of our region are unstoppable and full of hope, and that the only way to unite with Europe is through dialogue and cooperation among neighbouring countries.

Now that the matter of the status of Kosovo and its borders has been settled definitively, it is time to begin a dialogue on practical issues. We hope that the message enshrined in the resolution will immediately be put into practice by the two independent countries. We support the immediate launch of dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. We support sincere and constructive dialogue to resolve practical issues of interest to the daily concerns of their citizens, to help them and to facilitate and even calm the situation of the respective Albanian and Serbian minorities. It is time to resolve the problems and issues concerning representation, language and education, among others, in the spirit and vision of a common European future.

Albania considers the consensus adoption of resolution 64/298 to be an important step not only in respect of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the authority of the United Nations, but also for the consolidation of the State of Kosovo and its democratic and European institutions, its independence and integrity, and its future as a Member of the United Nations.

Albania appreciates the work of the Security Council in its engagement towards the implementation of the United Nations Charter and international law, which are essential to peaceful coexistence and cooperation among Member States in addressing common challenges and contributing to international peace and security.

The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice legally confirmed that the independence of Kosovo remains a sui generis case that does not set a precedent for situations in other countries. Now is the time to prove with concrete facts that we respect the United Nations and the values that have united us here today. Today is the day to testify that we support its authority and its independent institutions. Today is a golden opportunity to accept the truth and to declare it loudly.

Today, we have a responsibility towards a country and a people that rightly wish to be among us and have given ample evidence that they truly deserve it. I take this opportunity to appeal to my colleagues, whose countries have not yet recognized the independence of Kosovo, to recognize it now, by assuring them that this is the only way to contribute to long-term stability and peace, not just in the region but also globally.

In conclusion, I would like to confirm once again that Albania is determined to continue to support the United Nations agenda and the stronger functioning of the Organization at all levels.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Albania for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Bamir Topi, President of the Republic of Albania, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, President of the Dominican Republic

The Acting President: The Assembly with now hear an address by the President of the Dominican Republic.

Mr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, President of the Dominican Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, President of the Dominican Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Fernández Reyna (*spoke in Spanish*): Eight years after Switzerland became a full Member of the United Nations, we are delighted to see that the presidency of this General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session fell to the 2004 President of the Swiss Confederation, Mr. Joseph Deiss, to whom we wish the greatest success in his tenure.

In 1998, the twentieth special session of the General Assembly was held to contribute to the elimination or substantial reduction of the illegal production of drugs and drug abuse by 2008. Ten years later, at a follow-up review meeting supported by this prestigious world body, the conclusion was reached that little progress had been made regarding the proposed goals and that there were therefore plenty of reasons for the international community to be concerned about the growing threat posed by the global drug problem. It was determined that a new 10-year plan was needed to cover the period until 2019, when the General Assembly will have once again to convene Member States in order to assess the outcome of measures implemented to eliminate the most serious threat to our citizens' safety at the dawn of the twenty-first century: transnational organized crime and illegal drug trafficking.

Today, almost 250 million people between the ages of 15 and 64 consume drugs worldwide. Although that consumption extends to many regions around the world, the highest concentration of users is found in areas with the most pronounced economic and social development, such as the United States, Western Europe and Central Asia.

Drug consumption is harmful to health, causing personality disorders that often lead to loss of will, apathy and the development of pathological behaviour. Furthermore, tens of thousands of people die every year as a direct result of drug consumption, while others, depending on the way these toxic substances are consumed, are affected by diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C.

Today, illegal drug trafficking constitutes a global black market, a kind of underground or hidden economy for the growth, manufacture, distribution and sale of this merchandise in the form of marijuana, opium, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines and other varieties of such substances and others. That market, which is ruled like any other by the laws of supply and demand, now amounts to the astronomical sum of approximately $400 billion a year. That astronomical sum means that the global drug trade is worth more than the gross domestic product of 122 of the 184 countries that appear on the annual World Bank economic index. Every year, the global drug market generates more wealth than countries such as Chile, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, Israel, South Africa and Portugal. But, at the same time, it is more economically powerful than many of the world's leading petroleum producing countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

In pursuit of its goals of conquering markets and accumulating wealth, transnational organized crime has begun availing itself of a new type of unprecedented, inhumane and cruel violence. Drug trafficking uses kidnapping, contract killings, torture and beheadings both in battles between drug trafficking groups and against the people and institutions that confront them. Drug trafficking sows fear and terror. It executes public servants as well as ordinary citizens. It murders journalists, teachers, doctors, students and housewives. Drug trafficking knows no limits or borders; it knows only horror, barbarism, bloodshed and crime.

It is so powerful that it influences and interferes in vital areas of government, such as the armed forces, the police, intelligence services and the justice system, in its attempt to make State institutions serve its macabre and sinister interests.

In the face of all of this, some people are right to wonder whether transnational organized crime and illegal international drug trafficking can be defeated. Is it really possible to tackle and defeat all that this form of international crime entails?

Our response is: yes, it is possible. It is possible to take it on and to defeat it. It is possible to reduce it and to mitigate its harmful effects. However, to do so, several elements need to be in place. First, we need genuine commitment at the global level and authentic and genuine political will at the level of national Government.

We also need a paradigm change or a new strategic vision that will focus our efforts to fight the problem, not only on the supply side, as has fundamentally been the case so far, but also on the demand and consumption side.

It is imperative that we curb indiscriminate gun sales and human trafficking. We need to implement exchange and cooperation policies among the narcotics producer, transit and consumer countries. We need to introduce new technologies, strengthen intelligence systems, better train and enhance the professionalism of those in charge of ensuring public safety, design prevention mechanisms, generate educational opportunities, reduce poverty and create jobs, and get communities involved in building protective networks against crime.

We hope that, in 2019, when the General Assembly convenes its member States to evaluate the outcome of its new 10-year Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem (see resolution 64/182), we will be in a position to say, for the sake of our families, our young people, our societies and, ultimately, of humanity as a whole, "We have prevailed. We have defeated the leading threat to the security our peoples at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We have beaten drugs."

It is important also to note that the human and material losses experienced as a result of natural disasters in 2010 are a great cause for concern. To date, we have seen 47 floods and landslides, affecting countries as far apart as India and Brazil, China and Colombia, Russia and Congo, Kazakhstan and countries of East Africa, Mexico and Central America, Pakistan, Yemen and the Sudan.

To date, there have been 12 hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons, affecting countries such as Mexico, India, the Solomon Islands and Madagascar. To date, we have suffered eight serious droughts, followed by fires, in Bolivia, California, the Caribbean, China, Spain and Russia. To date, there have been seven earthquakes, from the tragedy in Haiti to China, from Tajikistan to Chile, and from Afghanistan to Mexico.

That does not include the volcanic eruptions — these too made no distinction between rich and poor. In the case of Iceland, the volcano led to the most serious interruption of air traffic since the Second World War. In addition, we need to take into account the numerous cold snaps, avalanches and storms that have occurred and their resultant epidemics — foremost among them, cholera in Africa and dengue fever in Latin America and the Caribbean.

As we can see, vulnerability to natural disasters around the world is on the rise, and development levels are falling quickly as a result. Most of these natural disasters are caused by climate change or global warming. It is therefore imperative that this world body adopt, as soon as possible, guidelines to regulate the emission of carbon dioxide and to protect the planet's biodiversity.

There is much work to be done around the world to draw up and adopt policies and practices that will enable us to prevent the impact of natural disasters. In this context, it is crucial to incorporate risk management into development and land-use planning. We need to design and implement early warning systems in coastal areas, cities at risk, schools and hospitals. And we need urgently to re-equip critical infrastructure to ensure that it is adequate to withstand future catastrophes and to minimize human loss. Faced with this situation, the Dominican Republic intends to participate actively in the work of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, whose next meeting will take place in Geneva, Switzerland, in May 2011.

Likewise, with advisory assistance from the United Nations Development Programme and New York's Columbia University, in October we will be meeting with the ministers responsible for social policy as well as the mayors of cities at greatest risk in order to review ongoing activities in the integration and planning of natural disaster risk management.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to suggest, as we did during a visit to L'Aquila, Italy, that

the United Nations system create a world alliance of countries at risk in order to exchange experiences, knowledge and ideas, and to pass along best practices learned during catastrophes. We are convinced that this would be a major contribution to the design and implementation of measures that will help save lives and minimize material damage.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly I would like to thank the President of the Dominican Republic for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, President of the Dominican Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Ms. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Lithuania.

Ms. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Ms. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Grybauskaitė: I am delighted and privileged to address this Assembly. I believe that this is the right place to discuss the issues of greatest concern to the international community. Recent years have been marked by many challenges. All countries, large and small, had to tackle the financial and economic downturn. They also had to deal with the painful consequences of natural and man-created disasters. In a global world, all our countries must share responsibility for the future. The scale of our deeds and the openness of our hearts will make the difference, not the size of our countries and territories. Here, I would like to share some views of my country, Lithuania.

Let me start with our proposals in the fields of security and the environment. Lithuania has launched an initiative to introduce in the General Assembly a draft resolution on sea-dumped chemical weapons. Lithuania wants to strengthen international efforts in raising public awareness about dangerous munitions buried in the sea. It is in every country's interest to support a voluntary information exchange in order to strengthen common security. Everyone must be aware how lethally dangerous these dumped chemicals still are. We need to have guidelines on how to behave in case of disaster. That is why United Nations involvement and an eventual resolution on this issue are so indispensable. That is why I call on the United Nations to take a much more active role in very concrete projects, even if they may not seem big enough for global attention.

Gender equality is another topic of vital importance for the nations of the world. We decided to promote it in the framework of the Community of Democracies. That is another example of precisely focused action. Gender equality issues are rarely associated with issues like overcoming the economic crisis or stopping climate change. However, it has been estimated that the elimination of gender discrimination in the labour market in Europe, for example, could increase gross domestic product by as much as 30 per cent.

It seems that the Lithuanian people have decided to test this estimate in practice, and I can give an example. It is no surprise to us that women in Lithuania hold a number of top positions in politics and business. It is only natural that Lithuanian women have made their own the famous saying: When the going gets tough, the tough get going. But we still need much more coordinated effort. Gender equality on a global scale will become possible only when a certain level of security and economic development is achieved. Let us all put all our efforts together to eradicate intolerance and discrimination, which so often are the main reasons for the many conflicts in the world. By doing this we also pave the road to achieving the Millennium Development Goals that we all aspire to. European Union activities such as the European Institute for Gender Equality, based in Lithuania, can serve to lead other regions. I strongly hope that the high-level meeting on gender equality issues which will be held within the framework of the Community of Democracies in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 30 June next year will explore many more new ideas and good practices.

Security, the environment and gender equality: all are interdependent, and all need to be adequately addressed on the international agenda. That is a

prerequisite for ensuring sustainable development. The European Union has been for years the largest and most responsible donor worldwide, the best example for any country willing to contribute. These European values are very dear to my country, which has been a member of the European Union since 2004. Lithuania has limited resources, but we have provided humanitarian aid to Haiti, Pakistan, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia and other countries.

We have engaged in such difficult initiatives as the training of the national security forces of Afghanistan. Working together with the people of Ghor province in Afghanistan, Lithuania has funded a number of community-based education programmes, built 19 schools which have opened up their doors also for girls, founded the first public library in the province's capital of Chaghcharan. That is our modest contribution, but it works. I am sure that each time we implement a concrete project we move closer to achieving our global objectives all together.

I invite all the leaders gathered here to contribute. We should welcome, support and multiply any and every constructive effort, however small it may seem to us. Only joint efforts and concrete deeds will bring positive change to international politics. Let us develop initiatives, let us implement them, let us implement the best practices and let us work together.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Lithuania for the statement she has just made.

Ms. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Morales Ayma (*spoke in Spanish*): This is the first time I have participated in the general debate since the declaration of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and my fifth as President — since I took on enormous responsibilities towards my people, acting through social movements.

I would like to quickly say that in four and a half years in government, we have begun to bring profound structural and social change to Bolivia. Fortunately, two weeks ago, the United Nations recognized that extreme poverty had decreased from 41 to 32 per cent. In four and a half years, our small country of 10 million inhabitants has seen its national reserves grow from $1.7 billion to $9 billion. The rate of economic growth is currently 5 per cent, while before I arrived it was barely 3 per cent.

There has been a democratization of the national economy, with grants and subsidies that have allowed for the improvement of the economic situation of the poorest and most abandoned — in particular those of the rural and indigenous movement, but also our brothers and sisters the workers, and our brothers and sisters from the barrios of Bolivia's big cities.

However, the improvement of our economy has basically come with the recovery of our oil and gas reserves, and with the nationalization of these natural resources. Let me say that earlier, and unfortunately, under instructions from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), our natural resources were privatized. Moreover, the IMF contracts stated that the owner, the transnational oil company, would have the rights from the wellhead. The Fund Governors were telling us that as long as the oil or gas was underground, it belonged to the Bolivian State and the Bolivian people, but that once it was taken out and reached the wellhead, it was the property of the transnationals. From these mega-fields the oil transnationals received 82 per cent of the gas and oil revenue, while the Bolivian people were left with only 18 per cent.

It is a matter of responsibility. Countries that invest have the right to recover their investment and they have the right to make profits, but not 82 per cent of all of the profits from our oil and gas resources. On 1 May 2006, the Government decreed, first, that the State would take control of all oil fields. We nationalized them. Secondly, so that the investing company, seeking to recover their investment, could do so and make a profit. We looked at the numbers

carefully in order to ensure that the company would not be harmed. Our data showed that with 18 per cent of the profit, they would recover their investment and they would even have access to profits.

What I did with our supreme decree, after taking total State control of gas and oil, was to ensure that the State, the Bolivian people, received 82 per cent of the profits and the investing oil company, 18 per cent. These companies continue to be present in our country and continue to invest in Bolivia. We had discovered that there was an ongoing sacking of our natural resources and this alone has brought changes to our economy. For example, since 1940, Bolivia had never had a budget surplus, only deficits. But once we had nationalized oil and gas, in 2006, the first year of my administration, we had a surplus. With this surplus, we were able to provide grants and subsidies for some of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, namely, young people and the elderly.

In February 2003, when I was a union leader and National Deputy, the International Monetary Fund instructed the then Government to institute an income tax or to increase fuel prices in order to decrease the budget deficit — not to eliminate it, but to decrease it. The Government decided to institute an income tax. There was an uprising by those affected by this tax, and in two days of confrontation there were 15 dead.

I would like to say from here at the United Nations to the world and to the Bolivian people that, without income taxes and without increasing fuel prices, we had a surplus in the first year of our administration. It was so important to have recovered our natural resources and to have recovered our companies providing basic services.

Sooner or later the International Monetary Fund has to redress the damage it has done to Bolivia and to Latin America. But it appears that the International Monetary Fund, under the pretext of structural adjustment, is continuing to impose policies on some countries — policies of pillaging natural resources. It did us great harm. I am demanding officially that the International Monetary Fund pay for the economic damage and the damage to human beings that resulted from these impositions which, in Bolivia, resulted in death, injury and hunger.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg), Vice-President, took the Chair.

So I am very pleased that we have begun to change Bolivia. Of course, it is impossible to meet all the demands that our indigenous brethren have been making for 500 years, or that other brethren or regions have been making for hundreds of years — or indeed the demands which have arisen from 20 years of neoliberal Government in our country.

We are living in times of deep and sweeping changes. We have an enormous responsibility to future generations. The fate of Planet Earth depends on what we do or do not do.

We know ourselves. We have many ideological differences. We have many differences in our programmes, our cultures and our societies. We have many differences from one continent to another. The economic asymmetries are profound. But despite these differences we at the United Nations must work together, united. Why united? We must be united so that human rights will be well and truly protected around the world. I come here to propose an alliance of all presidents and Governments so that we can save humankind and save Planet Earth — or save humankind by saving Planet Earth.

There are four main objectives, the first being the protection of human rights. I commend the many Governments that last week adopted a proposal from the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia that water be recognized as a human right. Next will be energy and after that communication. We must move forward and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable — the poor, the disenfranchised, the migrants. All basic services in Bolivia are a human right under the Constitution. And we are currently translating that concept into practice, so that all these basic services will truly be a human right. That is why I think it important to have an alliance now, in this new millennium, to see that human rights are guaranteed for all.

I should also like to say that it is indefensible in the twenty-first century to continue to persecute and expel migrants — whether they are migrants because of economic problems or because of climate change or a natural disaster. I would like to take this opportunity to say that I learned from the media that President Obama is rejecting the Arizona law. We must recognize the need to put an end to policies — wherever they originate, including the return policies of Europe — that have the effect of expelling migrants. When our

ancestors migrated because of war or famine from Europe to Latin America there was no expulsion of migrants. Those European migrants took over thousands of hectares and pillaged natural resources, and no one said anything. But now that our brothers and sisters, driven by lack of work, emigrate in search of jobs in the United States or Europe, they suffer persecution, discrimination and expulsion. This has to stop. Our alliance must also examine the fate of these brothers and sisters.

I have also heard it said that walls or fences are being built in, for example, Mexico and Palestine. As far as I know, fences are only built to keep in cattle, sheep and cows. We cannot confuse human beings with animals and build fences to keep them in. It makes no sense. But I also want to say: how can we prevent human beings from going from one continent to another? We have heard much opinion in this debate on the subject of free-market policies. Are commodities to circulate freely around the world but not human beings? What type of discriminatory policies do we have? Those walls of shame must disappear. I listened carefully to the address by the Secretary-General. He wants the United Nations to be strong in the interests of good governance. I share that opinion but believe that we can only achieve this when we resolve the problems of the world's most defenceless people, who are migrants in this case. And that is why it is important for us to be rid of these walls.

But there is something else that is unthinkable in the twenty-first century: the economic blockade of Cuba. Everyone calls for the lifting of this embargo, imposed because Cuba was a Communist or socialist country. I want you to know that I too preside over a Government that is anti-capitalist, which, I think, is why the United States Department of State tries to marginalize and exclude us. That is not a solution. People will continue to rebel against systems and economic models that do not resolve the problems of the majority in all our countries. I respectfully ask President Obama to put an end to the economic blockade of Cuba and the economic blockade of the Gaza Strip in Palestine. If the United States is — and we all know this to be the case — the supreme world Power, it has the authority to end this injustice and this violation of the human rights of millions around the world.

The second objective of this alliance of Governments to save humanity is its most important responsibility: determining how to save Mother Earth. What concerns me greatly is that some countries, instead of conserving Nature, are looking at how to make a business out of climate change, putting a price on Nature. We must not privatize our forests; we must not sell carbon bonds as if the forest's only role were to absorb carbon dioxide. Any country that does so is making a grave mistake.

I want to share something from our culture and our experience in the indigenous world. We indigenous peoples live in harmony with Mother Earth, in harmony with Nature. Why do we live in harmony with Nature? We came from the Earth, we live on the Earth and to earth we will return. The Earth, Planet Earth, Nature, "Pachamama", Mother Earth — this is our home, this is our mother. The Earth gives us life: water, natural resources, the abundance of Nature. How can we turn Mother Nature into a business?

Because of the discussion I have with social movements around the world, particularly with indigenous movements, I am convinced that the planet can exist without human beings, but human beings cannot exist without the planet. As human beings have rights, like the right to life, so too does the planet, Mother Nature, have the right to life. Just as we human beings reproduce, biodiversity has a right to regenerate. For these and many other reasons besides, we have the obligation to save Planet Earth.

Within that context, our proposal is quite simple. Here at the United Nations we must develop a project to protect the rights of Mother Earth. This morning President Obama referred to the adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations. That was 62 years ago; before that we did not have rights. Later civil, economic and political rights were adopted. Three years ago the rights of indigenous peoples were adopted here. Now in this millennium we should adopt the rights of Mother Earth. And if we do not do this, we will be responsible for a world disaster.

To take an example: in a plane some people travel in first class, others in business class, while the majority travel in coach, economy class. If the plane crashes, no one survives — neither the first-class passenger nor the economy-class passenger. Is that what we want? It will be the same if we do not save Mother Earth. The transnational company with lots of money, the millionaire — all of us will be equally

affected by the environmental problems that come with climate change.

That is why I want to tell you how important it is that we prepare for Cancún, where we will have a great opportunity. I will propose there that we have an alliance of all the presidents and heads of government of the world, headed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. What will the alliance be for? So that together we can determine how to cool the planet. We are talking about global warming. How can we cool the planet? We, as peoples and Governments, are responsible for humankind. The people, at a summit in Cochabamba, Bolivia, said that we must stabilize the temperature increase at 1 degree Celsius. The developed countries, which are primarily responsible for global warming, must commit to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent during the second period of the Kyoto Protocol. Let us assume our responsibilities to cool Planet Earth.

I would like to discuss the serious situation in which my country finds itself. We sometimes buy drills to deal with droughts, and yet even by drilling we cannot find water. And if we do find it, it is buried ever deeper and occurs in ever-smaller quantities. Soon, despite all our drilling to obtain water, we will not find it. So what use will the drills be then? Our mountains are losing their snow fields. This is extremely serious. I therefore find it extremely important that we stabilize the temperature increase at 1 degree Celsius, as the people of the world have said.

The third objective, so frequently mentioned in statements, is peace. We are all fighting for peace. We are all fighting for freedom, but the basis of freedom is equality and justice for all peoples. There will not be peace without social justice. Moreover, peace is not made with military bases; peace is not ensured by military interventions undertaken on the pretext of fighting against drug trafficking and terrorism but really aimed at developing geopolitical interests — aims I do not share. Yes, we must combat drug trafficking. The best way to do so, I would say, is to put an end to banking secrecy. It is not right that the United States Government should decertify countries that are not following the capitalist line. The Bolivian Government is making an effort to reduce coca crops. But while the major cocaine-producing countries are certified, the country that makes a real effort against drug trafficking, a small country, is decertified.

These are, of course, political decisions, and that is why I draw the conclusion that anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist countries will never be certified by the United States Government. In the end, this does not concern or affect my Government. We are convinced that there will be this type of scare tactic, harassment and intimidation. That has always existed. But there are contradictions here as well. The United Nations tells us that coca cultivation has increased by 1 per cent, while the United States Department of State says that coca crops have increased by 9.4 per cent. Whom are we to believe — the United States or the United Nations? Imagine the spin that is put on this to penalize a Government or a country. The reports recognize the strong efforts undertaken by the national Government in the fight against drug trafficking. For example, dried coca is down to 43,000 tons from 43,500. But even this effort is not recognized, which is why we are convinced that this is clearly a political problem.

I believe that it is important to put an end to the acts of aggression, to the interventions in such countries as Afghanistan and Iraq, and to the threats to Iran. Let us put an end to the entire nuclear arsenal, because the nuclear arsenal is a threat to life. Let us begin with the United States and then continue with all the other countries. And this is not merely an attempt to punish a country that may wish to implement other policies. Instead of spending so much money allegedly on defence and security, in the end it is for war. If we are responsible to humankind, we must change everyone's mindset.

The last objective of this alliance would be to work together to strengthen the United Nations, but we also have to begin to democratize the United Nations. This is a very difficult task, of course. We have heard statements made by heads of government and by presidents. Some anti-capitalist presidents are accused of being authoritarian or totalitarian, of being dictators. Delegations know, and the world knows, how a coup d'état in a country such as Honduras can be ensured here. This morning President Obama talked about working with countries that fight against poverty. In Bolivia we have greatly reduced poverty, and yet investments are cut. He has said that he will work with democratic Governments. In Bolivia, in five years I have won two referendums and three elections, all with more than 50 or 60 per cent of the vote. Where is the dictatorship? Where is the authoritarianism? The authoritarianism is here at the United Nations. Some

Governments, some countries have permanent seats with the right to veto. That is authoritarianism, and that is why we must begin to democratize the United Nations if we want to move ahead with a democratic mindset or focus. We must start by practising democracy here. But, above all, I want to tell you, brothers and sisters present here, that we must work together to ensure that, sooner or later, the United Nations becomes an anti-capitalist Organization, if we are to save humankind. If we do not do that, we will be held responsible. And I assume my responsibility by telling you this in a direct and straightforward way. I am not at all scared because I know what the consequences of capitalism are — in particular, with regard to the destruction of Mother Earth.

I was thinking that our United Nations — and as a President I feel part of the United Nations — should have a slogan, a war cry for the effort to save humankind. I propose to the Assembly and its President that our war cry should be "The planet or death; we shall win!" And I wish to say that, from what I have learned in my four and a half years as President of my country, if there is the political will to serve the people of the world, the people of the world can be saved.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

President Koroma: Once again, it is a great honour and pleasure for me to address this distinguished Assembly. Let me start by congratulating Mr. Joseph Deiss on his assumption of the presidency at the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly and assuring him of my delegation's full support and cooperation. I would also like to convey my sincere appreciation to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, for his efficient and effective conduct of the previous session. My gratitude also goes to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive account of the work of the United Nations and his analysis of the challenges facing our global community.

In my statement I would like to talk both about the successes that my country has achieved with the help of the international community and about the reforms we now need to make in the way we interact and govern ourselves globally. My Government is sincerely grateful for the international community's engagement with Sierra Leone's efforts to put the country on a path to sustained economic growth and development. Building on this engagement, our country has significantly improved our international standing in many areas.

The Global Peace Index now ranks Sierra Leone as the fifty-third most peaceful country in the world. The Mo Ibrahim Index records that we are one of the five crisis-affected countries that have made a significant leap forward in democratic governance. A recent International Monetary Fund review shows improvement in our public finances, with our 4 per cent annual economic growth rate higher than the average rate of 2 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa. We have also made steady progress in our rankings on doing business, corruption perception and democracy. In addition, earlier this year I was the proud recipient on behalf of the people of Sierra Leone of a peace prize awarded by ACCORD, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes. And only last week my country received a Millennium Development Goal Award for showing outstanding leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

My Government has also continued to emphasize the protection of the basic rights of the people of Sierra Leone. We have put in place comprehensive justice sector reforms in response to both national and global demands, to ensure that the rights of citizens are preserved, and that they have access to justice for all. And the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone

has assumed a lead role in advising my Government on building a culture of human rights. It ensures that the Government ratifies international treaties and protocols and fulfils its reporting obligations. A case in point is our recent validation of the common core document that forms the basis for all reporting on international treaties.

Sierra Leone is among the few countries emerging from conflict that have formulated a comprehensive action plan for Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). My Government is determined to ensure effective implementation of the action plan, particularly in addressing gender-based violence as well as enhancing women's participation in politics and the public sector.

My Government's commitment to free media is equally strong. No journalist has been imprisoned in my country since I assumed office. We have transformed the Government-owned broadcasting services into what is only the second independent public service broadcaster in Africa, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon witnessed the launch of this historic, groundbreaking initiative in June. It is the beginning of a new era of access to independent, unbiased and impartial information in our country.

My Government is also delivering results on the key priorities in my Agenda for Change to improve the lives of all Sierra Leoneans. We have launched free health care for pregnant and lactating women, as well as children under five, for the first time in our history, improving access to around 300,000 women and more than a million children. We have also begun the serious commercialization of agriculture, the mainstay of our economy, particularly through smallholder farmers, for whom we are facilitating improved mechanization, irrigation and the establishment of farming cooperatives. We have successfully made significant progress on road construction and the rehabilitation of electricity supply in key provincial cities and towns, to generate economic activity across the country. We have made great strides in attracting large-scale private sector investors from international companies, following the Sierra Leone Trade and Investment Forum in London last year. Furthermore, to maintain macroeconomic stability and make those achievements sustainable, my Government also remains firmly committed to the fight against corruption.

Despite that progress, many challenges remain. I am proud of what Sierra Leone has achieved so far. But we need to further enhance our capacity to promote and protect human rights, establish good governance and managerial capacity across the whole public sector and fight corruption and trafficking in narcotic drugs. For all that, our country will need further technical assistance and cooperation, private capital investments and technology transfer.

Most importantly, we are not oblivious to the imperative of consolidating peace through enhanced political dialogue, tolerance and ensuring a free and fair electoral process. With those elements and our political resolve, we will make further progress towards peace, security and a stable and open democracy.

I shall now turn to the theme of the Assembly's sixty-fifth session: reaffirming the central role of the United Nations in global governance. It could not have been better timed, at a moment when the global community is grappling with myriad challenges facing the international system. The end of the cold war, together with an explosion in information and communication technologies, gave rise to a new paradigm of flexible or loose functional coalitions involving State and non-State actors. A new configuration of interdependent relationships, economic, social, political and ethnic in nature, has emerged from those historic circumstances.

There are fears that globalization nurtures the dominance of power politics, a growing disparity between the North and the South, intolerance of different values, a tendency to resort to force to solve international conflicts, and neglect of the environment. At the same time, globalization has led to a multilevel system of governance that is beginning to address global issues ranging from economic interdependence, migration, financial crises and drug trafficking to the pandemics of tuberculosis, avian flu, HIV/AIDS and malaria.

It is in recognition of the imperative to promote multilateralism and build synergies with both State and non-State actors that I commend the choice of theme. We support the United Nations more than any other organization as a centre of global governance. It has the unique characteristics of a global mandate and universal membership. Those characteristics make it an indispensable and neutral catalyst for the achievement

of international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character. The centrality of the role of the United Nations in global governance cannot be overemphasized.

The recently concluded High-level Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals revealed that progress has been uneven and that developing countries, particularly those in Africa, continue to be most vulnerable to the effects of globalization. The prevailing global recession resulting from the economic and financial crisis that struck developed economies has further compounded that challenge. In this context, my Government believes that the United Nations remains the crucial hub for norm-setting and harmonizing the actions of nations for the maintenance of international peace and security and for the attainment of our development goals.

The Assembly, meeting at the turn of the millennium, decided that reforming the Security Council and making it more accessible, transparent, equitably representative and accountable was long overdue. That brings me to the crucial issue that has led us in Africa to consistently reiterate that there can be no meaningful reform of the Council without allocating permanent seats to the continent.

No one continent should have an exclusive monopoly over membership of the Security Council. There is no justification for a discriminatory allocation of seats, nor can we debate endlessly and ignore the realities of our rapidly changing global circumstances.

While the fifth round of talks has not truly led to a compromise-oriented solution, distilling all positions into a single negotiating document has been a significant step in the right direction. We in Africa look forward to and support a process that will allow the text to evolve during the next session of the General Assembly in an open, inclusive and balanced manner, towards a solution that can garner the widest possible political acceptance by Member States. We urge all delegations to muster the political will required for progress.

I wish to conclude my statement by saying that the moment has come for us to address the historical injustice inflicted on Africa by allocating the continent no less than two seats, with all their attributes and privileges, and two additional seats in both the non-permanent and permanent categories of the Council. I do not need to emphasize that at the inception of the United Nations, most of Africa was not represented and that as a result Africa remains to this day the only continent without a permanent seat in the Council. To ensure greater relevance of the Security Council within a revamped United Nations system, Africa demands permanent representation on the Security Council, with all the requisite attributes.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Iraq.

Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Talabani (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session, and the friendly people of Switzerland, on his election. Our delegation will cooperate with him to its fullest extent in the performance of his task. We are confident that his experience and wisdom will be important factors in the success of the Assembly's work and in the achievement of the purposes of the United Nations. I also thank his predecessor, my close friend Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, for presiding over the Assembly at its last session.

The political process in Iraq since the collapse of the dictatorial regime in 2003 has resulted in radical political change, as well as in the building of a federal, democratic, independent and united Iraq with respected constitutional institutions and a Government elected in accordance with the Constitution. Achieving that goal

was neither easy nor simple. Iraq faced many challenges, foremost of which was confronting extremist, sectarian and factional forces and countering terrorist groups and groups of the former dictatorial regime that are attempting to take Iraq back to the dark era of mass graves and fruitless wars.

Those groups have used various means, including the most heinous crimes, and have allied themselves with organized crime and transnational terrorist networks in order to destabilize the security situation in Iraq. The main task of the Government of Iraq was to provide security throughout the country and to strengthen national unity and the rule of law.

There have been significant developments in Iraq since I stood before the Assembly last year. This year and last have witnessed a significant decrease in violence and a marked improvement in security in Iraq. Although there were some terrorist acts targeting innocent civilians in different places in the country, the overall security situation has improved, and that paved the way for the withdrawal of United States combat forces operating in Iraq. The complete pullout of those forces on 31 August 2010 was based on the Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq, signed by both parties on 17 November 2008.

This year has also seen successful legislative elections, which were held on 7 March with considerable Arab, regional and international interest. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the observers from the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States, the international community and civil society organizations all expressed their belief that the elections were transparent, free and fair.

The principal political parties have been in continuous communication with the aim of holding a fruitful session of the newly elected Iraqi Council of Representatives to elect a Speaker for the new parliament and the President of the Republic of Iraq, after which, according to the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution, the elected President will ask a new Prime Minister to form a Government. It is our hope that that new Government will be formed as soon as possible, as any delay will negatively affect the security situation, reconstruction and prosperity.

The improved security situation in Iraq has encouraged many Arab and other countries to reopen their diplomatic missions and has helped to develop Iraqi relations regionally and internationally. The appointment of new Iraqi ambassadors to various countries around the world has also helped to promote and broaden the horizons of those relations. Iraq's assuming the presidency of the current session of the Arab League and of the Arab Summit Conference in March of next year will promote Iraq's regional role and will be considered an important step in its efforts to regain its global standing as an effective and responsible member of the international community. The Government of Iraq will continue to move in that direction through strengthening its friendships, cooperation and good-neighbourly efforts, thus creating greater opportunity for stability and security in the region.

In the development arena, on 4 April 2010 the Government of Iraq initiated a national development plan for the five-year period from 2010 to 2014. It contains around 2,700 strategic projects in various sectors at a total cost of $186 billion. That plan will help to develop the Iraqi economy and enhance the quality of services provided to Iraqis. It will also create 4 million jobs, thus helping the unemployment problem in Iraq.

The national development plan will also help Iraqi refugees return to their homes. The Government of Iraq believes that the real solution for the problem of Iraqi refugees and displaced persons lies in their return to their homeland and their residences. Iraq needs the experience of all its citizens to help build the country's future. We therefore call upon countries hosting Iraqi refugees, international organizations and civil society organizations to promote awareness of the culture of voluntary return.

Iraqi women enjoy important status in the new federal and united Iraq and enjoy political rights equal to those of men. Women have been granted 25 per cent of the seats in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. Additionally, for the first time in many decades, the women of Iraq have assumed many important ministerial positions and have represented their country as ambassadors, this after having been deprived of those rights for more than 30 years. The Constitution also guarantees that women grant their nationality to their children.

The Constitution formulated the basic principles of Iraq's foreign policy, which focuses on observing good-neighbourliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, the resolution of disputes by peaceful means and the establishment of international relations based on shared interests and respect for Iraq's international obligations. On that basis, we seek to establish the best relations with sisterly Arab and Islamic countries and are committed to the resolutions of the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

In this spirit we support the Palestinian people's just struggle to secure their inalienable rights, including the establishment of a Palestinian State on the land of Palestine, as we work to implement the internationally legitimate resolutions aimed at returning the occupied Arab territories. We consider the Arab Peace Initiative to be a practical step towards resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieving security, peace and stability in the Middle East.

We also call for making the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, which would enhance the prospects for peace and security in the region. We call on all States that have not yet done so to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and comply with its provisions.

With regard to the Iranian nuclear issue, Iraq believes in the legitimate right of States to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. That is a right guaranteed by international conventions, including the NPT. We stress the importance of reaching a peaceful solution to that issue, and that dialogue and quiet diplomacy are the most effective ways to achieve that goal. Any escalation would harm the interests of all parties and would endanger regional security.

The most important issue Iraq continues to face is the removal of the burden created by Security Council resolutions adopted against it under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. By reviewing those resolutions, in accordance with Council resolution 1859 (2008) and in response to the report of the Secretary-General in document S/2009/385, we have been working diligently with our friends and members of the Council to settle all the outstanding issues concerning the situation in Iraq.

At the forefront of those issues are the remaining restrictions on Iraq in the field of disarmament, the conclusion of the remaining contracts under the Oil-for-Food programme and finding the right mechanism for guaranteeing Iraqi funds following the replacement of the Development Fund for Iraq and the International Advisory and Monitoring Board for Iraq. Iraq would like to see those dossiers closed by the end of this year.

The newly elected Iraqi Government will also deal with the situation between Iraq and sisterly Kuwait and related issues, such as the maintenance of border pillars, compensation and missing Kuwaiti persons and properties. We will work seriously with our Kuwaiti brothers, other stakeholders and United Nations organs to reach a settlement that satisfies all parties without prejudice to our obligations under Security Council resolutions, concerning which we emphasize our respect and commitment.

The situation in Iraq has changed as a result of the important positive developments since the collapse of the former regime and the end of the dictatorship. It is drastically different from the situation at the time the Security Council adopted resolution 661 (1990). For that reason, and following the adoption of resolution 1859 (2008) and the publication of the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 5 of that resolution (S/2009/385), we believe that the time is ripe for the Council to act in accordance with the Secretary-General's report and the mandate set out in resolution 1859 (2008). Also, in keeping with its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, it is time for the Council to review resolutions pertaining specifically to Iraq, beginning with resolution 661 (1990), with a view to helping Iraq achieve the international standing it enjoyed before those resolutions were adopted.

The current political process in Iraq aims at building a federal, democratic, independent and united Iraq, where citizens work within a constitutional framework that guarantees the rule of law, where human rights are protected and where all segments of the Iraqi people are treated with full respect. We have great faith in our ability and potential, as a country rich in natural and human resources, to achieve those objectives.

However, at this important stage in the life of the Iraqi people, we continue to need the political and economic support of and cooperation from the international community in order to stand on a firm foundation — one that will enable us to advance

towards a future in which not only can we promote our country's and our people's stability, progress and prosperity, but also contribute fully as a member of the international community to the achievement of peace, security and sustainable development for all nations.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Iraq for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Jalal Talabani, President of the Republic of Iraq, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Lieutenant-General Salou Djibo, President of the Supreme Council for Restoration of Democracy, Chief of State, President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of the Niger

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Supreme Council for Restoration of Democracy, Chief of State and President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of the Niger.

Lieutenant-General Salou Djibo, President of the Supreme Council for Restoration of Democracy, Chief of State, President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of the Niger, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Lieutenant-General Salou Djibo, President of the Supreme Council for Restoration of Democracy, Chief of State and President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of the Niger, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Djibo (*spoke in French*): At the outset, on behalf of the Republic of the Niger, I would like to extend to Mr. Joseph Deiss my sincere congratulations on his outstanding election as the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session. His country, the Swiss Confederation, is known for its long tradition in the area of international relations, and his own career reveals proven skill and a wealth of personal experience. Because of that, we believe that under his leadership the work of this session will be crowned with success. I can assure him of the full support and complete cooperation of my delegation in carrying out his noble and lofty mission.

To his predecessor, Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, representative of the great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, I would like to pay particular and fully merited tribute to him for the exemplary way and the talent with which he led the work at the Assembly's last session.

Finally, with consideration and admiration, I commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, a promoter of peace, for his tireless investment in the search for the most appropriate solutions to the many challenges that assail the world today and cry out daily to the individual and collective consciences of its leaders. The particular attention he gives to the situation of the most vulnerable countries, his constant advocacy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and his recent journey to Africa deserve to be commended.

The world will recall that on 18 February 2010, in the face of an anti-constitutional drift imposed on democratic and republican institutions of my country by the Government in place, and the grave and certain risk of the disintegration of national cohesiveness, the defence and security forces of the Niger were obligated to intervene on the political scene.

This was not the intervention of an army hungry for power, but that of officers who were concerned with safeguarding the unity and integrity of their country, which had been endangered by the Head of State at the time, who, through sheer self-interest, had decided to ignore, by undertaking a civilian coup d'état, all of the laws of the Republic, beginning with the Constitution itself, which was replaced with another that would have generously extended the presidential mandate for three years, which was to have ended on 22 December 2009. It was therefore for good reason that our arrival was welcomed by national and international opinion.

Having headed the country since 18 February 2010, the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, over which we have the great honour to preside, immediately set itself the primary goal of taking all decisions necessary to bringing peace to the socio-political life of the country. It was precisely to that end that it drew up its programme for governing on the basis of three pillars: the restoration of democracy; cleaning up the country's political and economic situation by fighting against impunity,

corruption and bribery; and the reconciliation of the people of the Niger.

With a view to restoring a normal constitutional regime, the National Independent Electoral Commission, which was created to that end, drew up and proposed a schedule for general elections and a draft budget for organizing seven planned elections to the Government and the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, which accepted them after slight modifications. According to that timetable, the electoral process will take place from 31 October 2010 to 6 April 2011 and will include a constitutional referendum as well as local, legislative and presidential elections.

I am pleased to recall here that, by an ordinance of 11 March 2010, we decided to make ineligible members of the defence and security forces, as well as members of the transitional Government. I should therefore like to take this opportunity to make an urgent appeal to the international community to continue to assist the Niger and its National Independent Electoral Commission in the organization of the programme of elections that I have just elaborated. This assistance is crucial if we are to achieve within the established time frame the core goal of the Supreme Council and the transitional Government of restoring constitutional order in the Niger, following the outcome of the electoral process.

Moreover, with a view to guaranteeing free, fair, transparent and credible elections, the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy and the Government of the Niger, solemnly request through me the participation of the United Nations and all interested international institutions in observing the various elections.

I was determined to make this trip to New York, despite the many urgent needs and constraints associated with the transitional agenda under way in the Niger, to solemnly reaffirm before this august and honourable Assembly that the commitments we made following the events of 18 February 2010 are now at a very advanced stage of implementation and that, God willing, they will be upheld within the established time frame and with international support. In this respect, I note and welcome the fact that, in the report he represented to the Security Council on 13 July 2010 (S/2010/324), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa stressed that the transitional authorities in the Niger have fully respected their commitments.

In accordance with the second commitment made by the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, on 11 May 2010 we established a commission to combat economic, financial and fiscal crime and to promote good governance, which is currently implementing a programme to restore the rule of law in the Niger. In parallel, a high authority for reconciliation and consolidation of democracy has been created. This new institution is working with all the necessary care to achieve the third goal, which is to consolidate our national unity.

Finally, at the international level, since 18 February we have clearly reaffirmed the Niger's commitment to the universal values of peace, security, good-neighbourliness, human rights, the rule of law, democracy, international solidarity, strict compliance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the African Union, the statutes of the Economic Community of West African States and all other relevant international legal instruments.

Poor economic and financial governance and the political and institutional crisis were, unfortunately, not the only threats facing the Niger. Sadly, there was another scourge that was even more dangerous and called for urgent countermeasures, but whose existence was long concealed by the authorities of the time. I refer to the very serious situation of food insecurity in which my country finds itself.

On 10 March, an urgent appeal was made to the entire national and international community for major support to be given to our country in its efforts to address this disaster. With the prompt and concrete support of the Niger's development partners and through the national mechanism for the prevention and management of food crises, action to mitigate the crisis has been diligently undertaken. Of particular note among these efforts are the cash-for-work operations, the sale of reasonably priced grain, the free distribution of food, seed and livestock feed assistance, and care for malnourished children.

I take this opportunity to convey to all our generous donors the profound gratitude of the people of the Niger, the Supreme Council and the transitional Government for that commendable and unforgettable show of solidarity. We hope to see it continue so that we can address the emerging situation resulting from

floods wreaking havoc in several regions of our country. We are also pleased to see that food security is high on the list of issues on which the General Assembly will focus during its current session and among the priorities set for the Organization in 2010 by the Secretary-General.

At this stage, I welcome the initiative of Under-Secretary-General John Holmes to come to the Niger and visit isolated rural areas in order to see for himself the desperate situation into which the people and their livestock have been plunged. During his visit, he was able to assess the scale of the crisis and its impact on people — in particular on children — and livestock. The appeal he made to the international community, advocating the mobilization of $130 million to provide urgent assistance to the populations affected, remains highly urgent. We know, however, that we can count on the understanding and ongoing concern of our development partners, which have already been reflected in the gradual resumption of their cooperation with the Niger.

It is obvious that my country has serious socio-economic problems, but the people of the Niger are determined to overcome them with the support of the international community. My country is young. It has just celebrated its fiftieth year of independence without fanfare because of the food crisis. Its people are young, but they are also dynamic and resolved to begin their march on the path to development.

This sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly is taking place in an international context of strong contrasts. Indeed, while tangible progress continues to be made daily in many areas of concern, we face many numerous and varied challenges in many other areas.

In Africa, positive developments have been recorded. I welcome the holding of free, transparent and fair elections, in particular in the Sudan and Burundi. I welcome the decision of the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire to organize presidential elections very soon. It is my hope that the electoral process under way will be a success. Indeed, that is the only way that Côte d'Ivoire will restore the stability and calm that will allow it to fully play its role as a driving force in West Africa.

Finally, I note that the peace and security architecture of our continental organization is being strengthened with the support of our partners, such as the European Union and the United Nations, in particular with imminent operationalization of the African peace force and the early warning mechanism. It is my ardent hope that significant progress shall soon be made on the political front in other friendly countries, such as the Central African Republic, the Comoros, Somalia and Madagascar, in the Great Lakes region and Darfur.

In the Middle East, the launch of direct bilateral negotiations should, we hope, lead to comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution, with an independent and viable Palestine living side by side in peace and security with Israel and other neighbouring countries. From this rostrum, I wish full success to the direct negotiation process among officials of those two countries, sponsored by President Barack Obama of the United States of America.

Other threats to international peace and security continue to confront us on a daily basis. I refer above all to terrorism, drug trafficking and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. West Africa — and in particular the Sahelo-Saharan region, of which the Niger is an integral part — is currently suffering the bitter nexus of terrorism and trafficking of all types. In spite of the efforts made, it must be recognized that national and regional authorities continue to have difficulty neutralizing these armed groups. The abduction last week of foreign nationals in northern Niger reminds us of the gravity of the situation and of the urgent need for the measures necessary to deal effectively with this threat to peace, security and development in our country.

Indeed, with each passing day, terrorism grows in scale in our subregion and threatens to tarnish the image of the Sahel countries, compromise tourist revenues and exacerbate our people's poverty and insecurity. We all know that poverty and desolation are fertile grounds for terrorists. We must therefore recognize the urgent need to promptly strengthen international cooperation and economic and social development programmes in these areas in order to eradicate these scourges. The response to all these evils must be coordinated. That is why the countries concerned created a mechanism to coordinate counter-terrorism activities following a ministerial meeting held in Algiers on 16 March. With respect to drug trafficking, the Economic Community of West African States has adopted a plan of action to combat it, and urgently appeals to the international community to assist in its implementation.

It has been widely understood since the 2005 World Summit that peace, security, development and human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. In other words, peace, security and human rights cannot be effective in a context of underdevelopment and poverty. It is clear that the Secretary-General fully shares this view because he has made sustainable development one of his highest priorities throughout 2010 through the achievement of internationally agreed development goals. In this respect, the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), held from 20 to 22 September, was a real opportunity for the international community to address many subjects of major concern more thoroughly.

As the participants in the High-level Meeting firmly highlighted and I would note, there is a clear link between the availability of resources and the achievement of the MDGs. From my point of view, the achievement of the MDGs remains possible for the Niger, as I emphasized at the Meeting, but only to the extent that substantial financial resources are made available, in particular through an expanded and enhanced partnership with the international community. That is why I appeal for the mobilization of the resources necessary through compliance with commitments made in the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2), the Monterrey Consensus (A/CONF.198/11), and in the Outcome Document of the Doha International Conference on Financing for Development (A/CONF.212/L.1/Rev.1*).

The terrible earthquake that struck Haiti with such force on 12 January; the deadly floods that continue to affect Pakistan, India and the People's Republic of China; the terrible droughts and floods in the Sahel; and the heatwave in Russia have all made us aware of our collective vulnerability to natural disasters and their underlying causes, such as environmental degradation and climate change.

In this respect, as highlighted by the participants at the 20 September high-level meeting on the International Year of Biodiversity, the protection of the environment should be everyone's priority. It is necessary to follow up on the voluntary commitments made in the Copenhagen Declaration, in particular with respect to financing adaptation and mitigation measures.

With respect to United Nations reform, it is encouraging to note the significant progress made in the empowerment of women, governance and financing activities to operationalize development. Let us not forget that, on 30 June, the General Assembly established the composite Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which, as of 1 January 2011, will be responsible for addressing gender issues in place of the four institutions that have hitherto worked to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. This is an important act which we dare to hope will lead Member States to advance in other sectors of United Nations reform, in particular reform of the Security Council.

I am convinced that this will strengthen the Organization's legitimacy and capacity for action in the service of international peace and security. Indeed, if it is to be up to this immense and delicate task, the United Nations must be just, representative and democratic.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, Chief of State, President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of the Niger for the statement he has just made.

Lieutenant-General Salou Djibo, President of the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, Chief of State, President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of the Niger, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Steven Vanackere, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Institutional Reform of Belgium.

Mr. Vanackere (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): History has shown us that words can change the face of the world. It has proven that the spoken word can influence the future, but only when they go beyond rhetoric. What is our global governance worth if it does not go beyond the expression of ambitions and intentions? Words remain ineffectual if they are not followed up with action. We must therefore act. I say "we", the nations united, because no country, no matter

how large, can respond alone to the great challenges facing humanity. I say "we" because no large-scale problem is limited to a single country, leaving untouched the lives of those who live elsewhere. The obligation to act is a shared, global responsibility.

(*spoke in English*)

That is why today my message is about responsibility and increased accountability.

At the heart of any form of governance lies responsibility, be it global or local, national or international. But this is not enough. Indeed, governance is not only about behaving responsibly; it is also about being accountable. This applies not only at the level of the single State, but also at the level of our United Nations.

Human rights, security and development are at the core of the mandate of the United Nations. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointed out the fact that the three are inextricably linked when he said:

> "There will be no development without security and no security without development. And both development and security also depend on respect for human rights and the rule of law." (*A/59/2005, annex, para. 2*)

It has indeed become common knowledge that human rights are unlikely to be protected in an insecure and underdeveloped environment and that economic development cannot be durably sustained in a society where there is no rule of law.

Accountability in international affairs is about respecting international law — the rules that govern relations among States. Without a solid legal basis, international cooperation remains optional and falls short of the necessary transparency and long-term sustainability. Important steps have been taken to uphold the rule of law at the international level over the past decades.

Belgium pleads for the universal acceptance of the competence of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. If all countries were willing to follow up on this appeal, we would be a step closer to having an effective and accountable international system.

Meeting our responsibilities in the field of human rights means ensuring efficient means and mechanisms to ensure their protection. We need to instil more coherence to our action. Unfortunately, today we focus our attention all too often on how to react to human rights violations while we should focus more on prevention and on the root causes of those violations.

Human rights are universal. My country strongly opposes any form of relativism in this respect.

International and regional human rights instruments need to be strengthened. The evaluation within the Human Rights Council in 2011 should give important momentum to that strengthening.

There is also a need for increased accountability in the field of security, another pillar of the United Nations. Over the past year, important progress has been made. The Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty came to a substantial and balanced result. Respect for Non-Proliferation Treaty provisions and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency are accountability in practice. Unfortunately, the non-acceptance or non-respect of these provisions by countries like North Korea and Iran threatens the international non-proliferation regime.

In particular, Belgium welcomes the entry into force earlier this year of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The prohibition of the production and use of cluster munitions has become the international standard. I am pleased and proud to announce that Belgium has recently destroyed its entire stock of cluster munitions.

The Millennium Development Goals and climate negotiations are at the top of our twenty-first century agenda, and rightly so. We are all responsible for our planet. In fact, we are all accountable to current and future generations, especially in the field of poverty reduction and environmental protection. Let us not forget the ancient Native American saying: "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children".

Creating a world that is equitable, a world that will last, is our common responsibility. Belgium is doing so by spending 0.7 per cent of its gross domestic product on development cooperation.

If we indeed accept the need to be accountable for the results we do or do not obtain, we should have the courage to evaluate and adapt the institutions and instruments at our disposal. In that respect, Belgium fully supports the efforts of the European Union to

participate in a timely and effective manner in the work of the General Assembly.

If it is to contribute effectively to global governance and to take up its global responsibility, the United Nations needs to continue its efforts to become more representative and more efficient. The creation of UN Women was a welcome development, and it has my country's full support. Of course, gender will need to remain a mainstream theme influencing the actions of each and every United Nations institution.

Important discussions on the reform of the Security Council have been ongoing for quite some time. Belgium hopes that the negotiations will soon lead to concrete results.

I have talked about institutions, and concerns about institutions are, of course, legitimate. But they should never lead us to forget that the first accountability of humankind is not created by abstractions or institutions, but by the face of a person in dire need: of the man, woman or child who is the victim of violence; of those who suffer the violence of nature, or from violence perpetrated by other men.

When it comes to humanitarian protection and aid, responsibility and accountability have never been more necessary. That is why United Nations peacekeeping missions with strong mandates, especially in the field of the protection of civilians, are important and should be given the necessary instruments, not least in the context of the fight against sexual violence. In this context, Belgium strongly supports Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and its goals of ensuring the participation, protection and promotion of women in peace and security.

The concept of sovereignty cannot be used as a justification for human rights violations against the citizens of any country. On the contrary, sovereignty implies the responsibility to protect, and we support the efforts of the Secretary-General to further put this principle into practice.

My key message of increased responsibility and accountability also applies to certain situations in the world that I would like to address briefly: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

(*spoke in French*)

The fiftieth anniversary of the independence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been an opportunity to measure the unquestionable progress made over recent years. What is important as we move forward is the consolidation of peace and democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Belgium is pleased that the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has incorporated the element of peacebuilding alongside that of peacekeeping.

The elections in 2006 allowed the Democratic Republic of the Congo to choose the path of democratization. The Congolese authorities have expressed their determination to persevere on this path in confirming their intention to hold elections in 2011. That deserves our full support.

Despite all this progress, it is clear that many challenges remain. In spite of the rapprochement among its neighbours, the situation in the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains worrisome. We were reminded of this by the shocking reports of widespread rape in Luvungi.

The fight against impunity, which is crucial to my country, hinges first and foremost on the strengthening of the rule of law. It is one of the primary responsibilities of the authorities, but here, too, the support of the United Nations and the international community is crucial. Belgium calls on the international community to continue to assume its responsibility.

(*spoke in English*)

Like in every country, the Afghan Government is held accountable by the Afghan people. We hope that last weekend's elections contributed to this. However, the Afghan authorities do not stand alone. The international community, with a central role for the United Nations, assists the Afghan Government in enhancing the level of accountability to its population. Gradually, the Afghan authorities need to take on more responsibility, especially in the field of security. This transfer is welcome, but rather than being calendar-driven, it should be results-driven.

The Belgian Government has decided to extend its current military and civilian presence until the end of 2011. We believe that 2011 will be of crucial importance in transferring further security

responsibilities. The focus of the Belgian presence beyond 2011 will therefore likely be more and more on civilian assistance.

Nobody can remain untouched by the devastation and human suffering caused by the floods in Pakistan. As members of the international community, we have to take on our responsibility. This "slow-motion tsunami", as the Secretary-General called it, demands a long-term and strategic answer. Belgium therefore welcomes the three-step approach — the meeting last Sunday in New York, the meeting in Brussels next month of the Friends of Democratic Pakistan, and the donor event in November — which clearly sets out the framework for reconstruction.

We have to move beyond the stage of emergency aid. In this respect, I am glad to say that the European Union last week took the firm commitment to improve market access for Pakistan as a concrete measure to reinvigorate Pakistan's economy.

Allow me to conclude by recalling John F. Kennedy's observation that the only reward for a politician is a good conscience. It may be true that not many other rewards should be expected for politicians. But even so, the conscience of a politician cannot free him from the obligation of being accountable to those he wants to serve, to the people he wants to represent and to the country he wants to lead.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Jean-Marie Ehouzou, Special Envoy of the Republic of Benin.

Mr. Ehouzou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): I bring a message on behalf of the President of the Republic of Benin, His Excellency Mr. Boni Yayi, who was not able to come to New York because of scheduling conflicts. He shares the ambition of the President of the General Assembly at the sixty-fifth session to build a United Nations that is strong, inclusive and open as a guarantor of global governance. I am convinced that the productive experience of the President of the General Assembly at the head of the Swiss Government, which enabled his beautiful country to enter the United Nations, will be a valuable asset to us. From this perspective, Benin will make its contribution to the work of this session and, in so doing, will strive to promote the ideals of the Charter, to which my country reiterates here its full support.

I would also like to express to Mr. Deiss my warm congratulations on his election as President of the General Assembly at the sixty-fifth session. His predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Ali Treki, who brilliantly led the work of the General Assembly with respect to Africa, strove to find appropriate solutions to the great challenges facing humankind with skill and tact throughout his mandate. We pay tribute to him for his good and loyal service to the international community.

I would also like to welcome the courageous and determined action of His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and commend him for having taken the measure of the grave crises affecting the world and for his ongoing commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Thanks to his bold initiatives to promote international cooperation, he has been able to revive the virtues of multilateralism as the optimum way to manage world affairs in an inclusive and participatory framework that stresses the uniqueness of our world and the common responsibility of human beings to maintain the fundamental balances on which human survival on Earth depends and the sustainability of the biosphere.

The trail blazed by the founding fathers of the United Nations in the areas of international peace and security, the promotion of human rights and development is that of dialogue, cooperation and a global partnership to promote the common good of humankind.

The raison d'être of the United Nations is not only to provide a framework of reference and universal convergence to coordinate national policies, but also and above all to address interests with respect to the parameters that define areas of tension between aspirations and the demands of our peoples and States in all their diversity.

If the United Nations did not exist it would have to be created, because we cannot imagine a world today without the United Nations. I would therefore like to express Benin's commitment to the irreplaceable role of the United Nations and its funds, agencies, programmes and various specialized institutions, which provide an invaluable service to humankind as a secular extension of our collective conscience.

The High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) convened by the Secretary-General defined a programme of action to achieve the Goals by 2015. In implementing these measures, it is important to take continuously into account the deadlines set for the achievement of the MDGs in the light of the additional difficulties related to the current crises of the financial and economic system and to previous crises.

It is the duty of the international community to mobilize the resources necessary to address the grave distortions that caused these crises. Vulnerable countries must make investments to relaunch sustainable agricultural production and maintain sustained growth capable of generating long-term prosperity and sustainable human development, because the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals must be guaranteed in perpetuity.

The United Nations must now, and with a sense of urgency, use its full influence to provide the means to help countries in difficulty ensure the survival of threatened populations and vulnerable groups that could be decimated by famine and disease if nothing is done to help them. The time has come to give substance to the right to food because it is unacceptable that hunger should persist among the causes of human suffering in the twenty-first century. In the short term, priority focus should be on strengthening social protection systems in low-income countries and on reactivating dormant local production capacity by promoting small and medium-sized agricultural businesses in order to avoid a drastic increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty.

In the medium and long terms, it is necessary to rethink policies to promote investments in agriculture in order to re-establish the balance between cash crops and food products and thus ensure food security in countries, taking their cultural specificities into account.

The international community must begin to evaluate the effectiveness of its strategic monitoring mechanisms in order to strengthen their ability to foresee systemic shocks. What is predictable should be predicted in order to define a long-term approach and to build, on the basis of available scientific data, a desirable future for our countries and peoples, who must cooperate to that end.

In this respect, the proposal to increase the agricultural share of official development assistance from 3 per cent to 10 per cent is a strategic approach that should be implemented with common political will commensurate to the challenge. Here, I pay tribute to countries that have already made concrete commitments to providing additional resources to that end.

Benin is an agricultural country, and agriculture must serve as a springboard for its development. In that regard, the Government of Benin is working to promote synergistic growth and the fight against poverty in order to align democracy and new-found freedoms with shared prosperity by carrying out the social transformations necessary to ensure the effective participation of all sectors in national development efforts.

The Government of Benin is working to promote agricultural mechanization, but given that the latter cannot have the desired impact without water management, we are also planning for rational management of that resource in order to maximize its use and ensure its sustainability. These investments will allow us to make the work of farmers less difficult and to limit post-harvest losses in order to ensure that agricultural production covers national needs and generates surplus for export.

In the framework of efforts to diversify agricultural production, the Government of Benin is also working to promote crops for marginal farming land to produce biofuel. The goal is to reduce dependence on and the rising cost of hydrocarbons, which have been exacerbated by the drastic drop in hydroelectric power caused by climate change, which has also seriously affected the country's economic activity in recent years.

West Africa has been deeply affected by soil degradation, coastal erosion and the effects of frequent floods due to climate change. Here, we express our appreciation for the awareness-raising undertaken by the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. It is important to devote more resources to implementing the Convention in the framework of fighting climate change.

Adaptation and mitigation measures should be implemented with a sense of heightened urgency in order to help regions affected. Financial and development institutions should pay special attention to programmes to revitalize soil and to promote irrigation farming and reforestation, using species that

can increase food availability. We reaffirm our sympathy for countries that have been struck this year by natural disasters, in particular earthquakes, and Haiti in particular, with which we share close lineage and cultural ties.

My country, Benin, will hold presidential and legislative elections in March 2011. After 20 years of democracy during which elections have been organized on the basis of manually recorded lists, my country's Government, in collaboration with the United Nations and its development partners, has finally decided to create a computerized permanent electoral list that will ensure transparent elections and significantly reduce complaints and other post-electoral difficulties. The political class of Benin agrees unanimously on the need for such a computerized list, but differences remain with respect to the process, the timing of its implementation and its use for the presidential and legislative elections in March 2011.

I am confident that, through dialogue and Benin's creative genius, which ensured the outstanding success of the national conference of political stakeholders in February 1990, Benin will be able to meet this challenge and once again surprise the world. I call on the United Nations and the international community to continue to support the efforts of the Government of Benin to work successfully to address the major challenges of today and the future.

We must maintain international peace and security. This is the first of the major tasks assigned to the United Nations. In spite of the tireless efforts of the Organization alongside regional organizations, humankind continues to suffer as a result of ongoing armed conflicts, the destructiveness of which leads to unimaginable suffering for affected populations.

Terrorism, which we condemn without reservation in all its forms and manifestations, also continues to indiscriminately afflict innocent civilian populations, including humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel despite the specific international protection they enjoy.

We are concerned by these serious infringements of the humanitarian principles relevant to conflict situations. We must work to strengthen the authority of international humanitarian law and the multilateral international justice institutions in order to increase their deterrence capacity with respect to serious crimes.

Here my country reiterates the importance it assigns to the responsibility to protect, and we will spare no effort to ensure its operationalization in accordance with the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

We appeal to all peoples and to all citizens of the world to respect the value of human life and to work in a spirit of peaceful coexistence and good-neighbourliness to resolve their disputes through cooperation, exchange and seeking mutual understanding, promoting a culture of peace and dialogue among religions for the common good of all humankind, at peace with itself.

To this end, we must pay greater attention to efforts to eradicate the underlying causes of conflict and in particular to put an end to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons that leads to their proliferation and thus to lawlessness and insecurity in our towns and countryside.

Respect for human rights and civil liberties means that human beings must be placed at the centre of sustainable development efforts, and it is the duty of the international community to ensure this. It is essential that respecting human rights become a way of life and the essential standard that validates human behaviour on a daily basis so as to promote mutual respect, equal opportunities in life and the full realization of the potential of every individual.

In this context, I would like to highlight the important role young people and women have to play in the development of our countries. In declaring the year that began 12 August 2010 as the International Year of Youth, the General Assembly highlighted the contribution that young people make to society. We urge all Member States to give concrete substance to the International Year of Youth, in line with the situation in their countries.

The theme of the Year, "Dialogue and Mutual Understanding", aims, moreover, to foster alliances among the generations. The Government of Benin is determined to make its modest contribution by supporting the effective holding of the United Nations Conference on Youth, which is currently being prepared, to mark the Year.

With a view to ensuring that the potential of women, who represent more than half of the population of my country, is fully realized, the Government has set up a National Institute for the Promotion of Women. A

microcredit programme for the poorest women was also launched to ensure the promotion of their economic activities. To date, this programme has helped to empower almost 600,000 women by providing income-generating activities. The programme should be expanded, which will require additional financial support from the international community and, in particular, from technical and financial partners.

Promoting the rule of law at the international level requires the effective participation of all peoples in the management of world affairs in the interest of current and future generations. In particular, the representation of developing countries should be strengthened in the decision-making bodies of the international financial institutions, as should their accountability. Their institutional mandates should be redefined so that they better help to mobilize resources in support of the development of the least developed countries, while ensuring the stability of the international financial system.

The Security Council is an essential instrument for global governance. Its long-awaited reform cannot be postponed indefinitely. Reform efforts are being held hostage by the inherent contradictions in today's international relations and remain hopelessly at a standstill despite the crucial importance we all recognize them to have for the effectiveness of the Organization. The ongoing negotiations towards reform must be carried out in good faith and with a keen sense of responsibility in order to preserve the credibility of the Organization, which has been beset by heavy liabilities.

Let us avoid trite formulations that evade the very essence of reform, which is to ensure the equitable representation of States in both categories of membership and to guarantee that the Council's decisions have the transparency, legitimacy and authority necessary for it more effectively to uphold its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

In this respect, Benin reaffirms, from this rostrum, Africa's legitimate aspirations. The democratization of the United Nations also means a stronger commitment to respect for national and international law on the part of Member States.

Here Benin renews its firm commitment to continuing to contribute to the ongoing adaptation efforts of the Organization, which is solidly anchored in its main principles of the sovereign equality of States, respect for human dignity, the promotion of development cooperation and the search for the best solutions to the world's problems.

In this spirit, I should like to conclude by making an urgent appeal for the strengthening of international cooperation. International cooperation is neither a form of social assistance nor an organized hybrid system of begging and deception. It should be based on legitimate mutual interests — a joint effort towards a contract of solidarity, which would enable us together to attain the means to forge conditions for humanity to live in greater dignity and with ever-greater creativity. This is the thought that inspires us in this year when we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of 17 African countries.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

Two representatives have asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements made in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and 5 minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Salsabili (Islamic Republic of Iran): This evening, the delegation of Belgium made baseless allegations against the peaceful Iranian nuclear programme by considering it as a threat to the international non-proliferation regime. In this regard and in exercise of right of reply, I should like to state the following.

First, these allegations are without any foundation. Iran's nuclear activities are and always have been for peaceful purposes, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has repeatedly confirmed the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme.

Secondly, according to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the development of peaceful nuclear energy is an inalienable right of every Member State, and my country is no exception in this regard. In exercising this right, Iran takes its responsibilities seriously. Our commitment to non-proliferation remains intact.

And, finally, unwarranted focus on the peaceful, safeguarded nuclear facilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, rather than addressing the existing proliferation threat posed by the secret, non-safeguarded nuclear-

weapon installations of the Zionist regime, is counterproductive and constitutes a dangerous distraction. We urge Belgium to refrain from turning a blind eye to that genuine proliferation threat and, in this context, to abandon its inconsistent approach to non-proliferation.

Mr. Grauls (Belgium): I would like to remind the representative of Iran that Belgium, as a member of the European Union, fully adheres to the position repeatedly expressed by the European Union with regard to the Iranian nuclear issue.

The meeting rose at 3.10 p.m.